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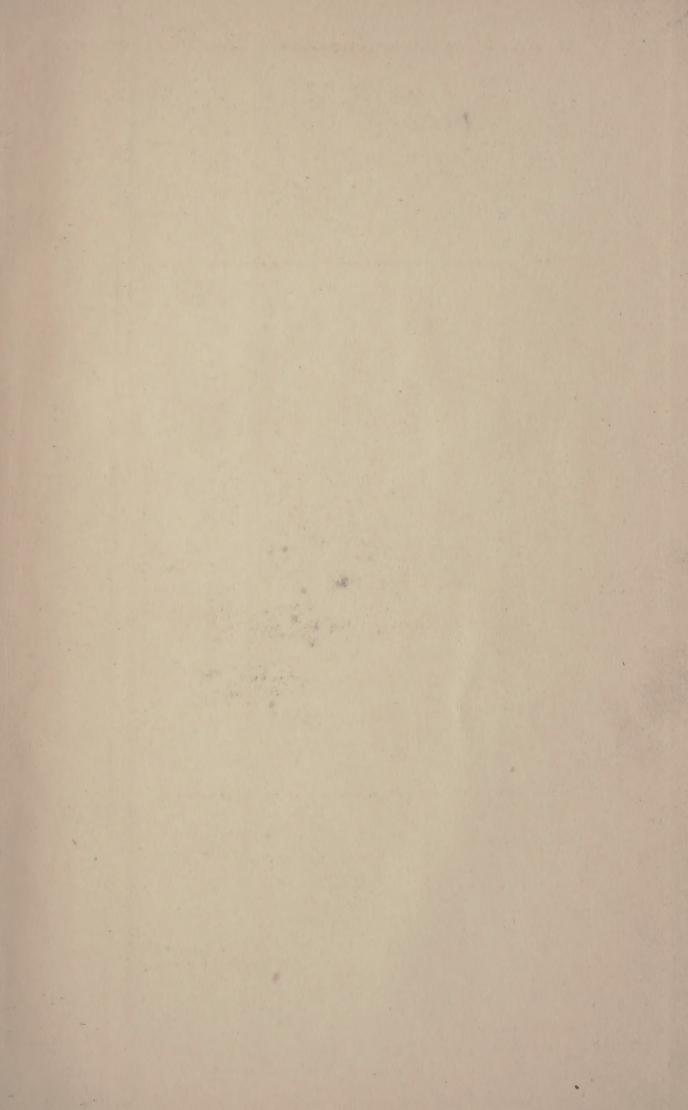


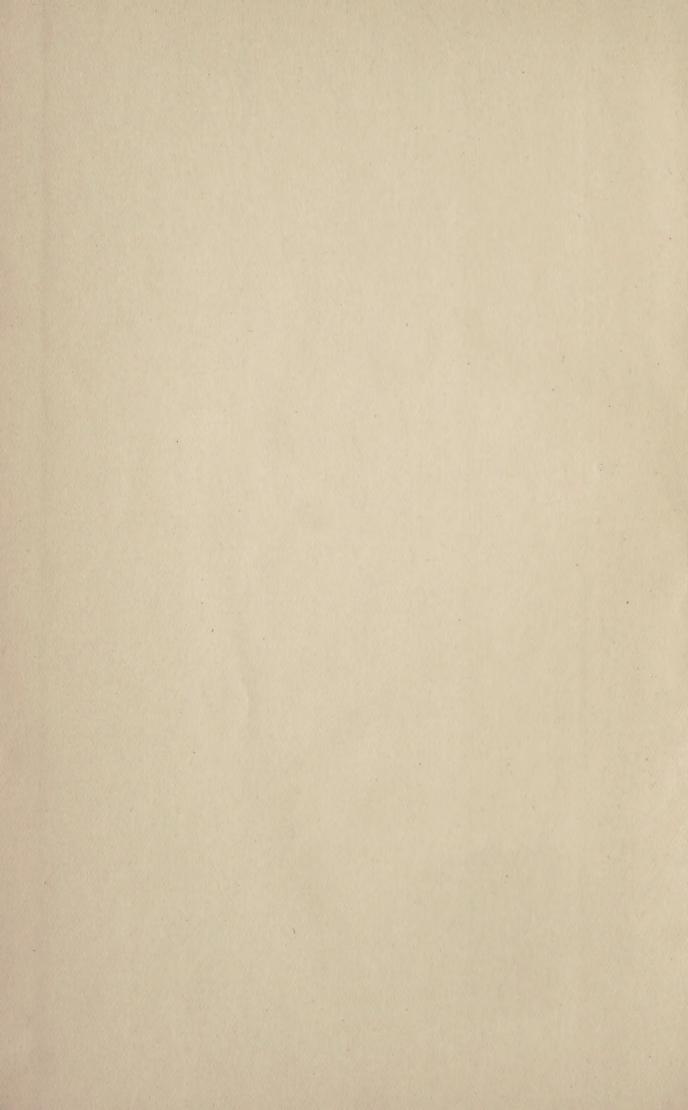
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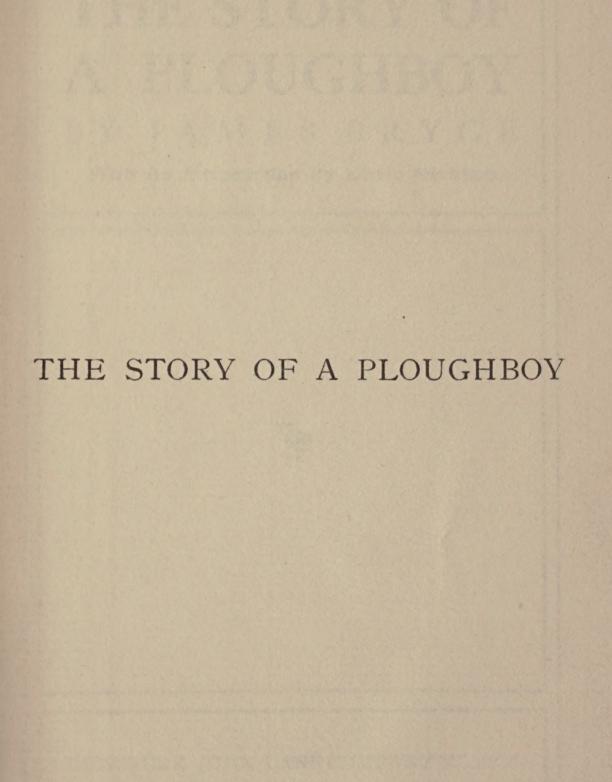
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THE STORY OF A PRODUCTION

# THE STORY OF A PLOUGHBOY

BYJAMESBRYCE

With An Introduction By Edwin Markham



NEW YORK JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXII

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# A Note of Introduction

## By EDWIN MARKHAM

Author of "The Man with the Hoe and Other Poems."

"THE PLOUGHBOY" is a big story bearing the bloodprints of reality. It is a revelation of rural life in a nation counting itself the most cultured on the planet. Not the darker depths of a great city are more terrible in their yield of misery and penury than are these Scottish

country scenes.

The garden, the orchard, the dairy, the leafy lane, the ivied cot, do they not stand to us rosily romantic—the abode of peace and plenty and quiet poesy? But read the ploughboy's record of the reality of today, and see how in this green and pleasant land (as in Emerson's Monadnock) the squalid peasant falls below the heroic grace that these sheltered haunts should produce.

With relentless onrush, with a flash of pity and terror, the story sweeps into our consciousness certain terrible facts of life. It dramatizes certain supreme issues of this time and of all times. Its vivid annals touch the

heart and the spirit.

When the sap rises into the trees under the immemorial surge of springtime, some occult sympathy causes the pent juices in the cellar vats to begin to ferment. There is today a spring-tide surging in the thinking world that is also causing a ferment even in the most

obscure corners of all lands.

Questions that were on the lips of Isaiah and of Jesus are again troubling the hearts of the world, troubling those in high and those in lowly places. Wage-workers, dully rubbing their eyes, are asking, "Why do others reap where we sow, and seize where we create?" Writers and preachers, blinking at the light, are asking, "Why may we not speak as we think? What has set seals upon the thought of progressive mankind?"

And the answer comes echoing, "Things, not souls, have become the aim of the masters of the world. Prop-

erty interests are holding mankind in a glacial clutch."

## THE STORY OF A PLOUGHBOY.

Strong men have come to believe that property, not humanity, is the one sacred thing below the skies. They forget that property is worth while only as a basis for the bread, the beauty and the brotherhood necessary to

a complete life.

But the ancient ice-pack is breaking. The genial currents of the heart are beginning to touch the frozen shores of selfishness. Fair conditions of health, a share of leisure, a share of the common resources of nature, the resources needed to live a decent and dignified existence—these things the Twentieth Century is beginning to demand for all from the lords and masters of the land.

"The Ploughboy" depicts the processional of Scottish farm-life with its ever-present sense of the long arm of the land-holder, an arm directing the fortunes of the workers, coercing their acts and speech, conditioning their personal conduct toward their neighbors; and through it all sounds an Æschylean note of the fate that shadows our time—the might and the mercilessness of

Property.

This story is not a religious novel, in the sense that "Pilgrim's Progress," and "Robert Elsmere" are; yet it contains a profound, spiritual revelation. For the hero, snatched up from the wriggling mire by a Setebos grab of chance and tempted in all ways as his comrades were, experiences religion in the terms of the new social morality of today—in a final and never-to-be-lost sense of the solidarity of mankind—the feeling that the neighbor should have the right to share life on equal terms with ourselves.

To read this story that quivers with the pathos and the passion of life is to get a keener and kindlier vision of our mortal existence. Only in such books as Hamlin Garland's "Main-Traveled Roads" and Querido's "Toil of Men" do we get a similar unflinching realism and a similar sense of the deprivations and desperations of the men at the bottom of the human pyramid.

But do not take it that "The Ploughboy" is a hopeless book. That this lad of the furrow could keep the gleam of ideality, could achieve the vision of the oneness of humanity—this avouches the presence and power of the principle of righteousness in the heart of man.

## THE STORY OF A PLOUGHBOY.

You find in this story threads of vivid interest, although I do not find to my liking the social cure suggested by the hero. I cannot see that the extreme simplicity of life proposed by Tolstoy is the path of escape out of our troubles. The way of deliverance is not in a return to the Adamic Paradise, with its one man alone in the garden; but rather in a pressing forward (taking with us all the riches we have acquired) determined to make foundations on the Earth for that holy city of fraternity revealed in the Apocalyptic vision of St. John.

EDWIN MARKHAM

Westerleigh Park, Staten Island February, 1912.



PART I
The Farm



# The Story of a Ploughboy

# Told by Himself

#### CHAPTER I

N boyhood I passed through the Valley of the Shadow, though above me shone a star. Let me speak of the darkness first.

When I had served six months at Abbot's Mailing, Big Pate came at Martinmas as first ploughman. The moment I looked at him, my instinct read hate in his eyes. Ere twelve hours were over, I found it had given no idle warning. My morning duty was to drive the milk-cart into Craigkenneth, and I had to rise at five o'clock, half an hour earlier than the men. Florrie, who helped the mistress with the milking, wakened me by knocking on the bothy door. I slept with Big Pate, and on the morning after his arrival I had touched him when getting out of bed or he had been disturbed by Florrie's knock. He muttered some curses which I did not much heed. At midday, when I came over to the bothy after having my dinner in the farm-kitchen, the men had finished their meal and thrown themselves on their beds. My entrance made Pate raise himself on his elbow.

"Ay, I've something to redd up wi' you," he began in deep

growling tones. "Shut that door and come here."

When I obeyed, he looked at me in silence for a while, his black eyes glaring beneath his bushy brows. I trembled

already, and he went on,

"What the devil made ye wauken me this morning?" and on my faltering out that I had not wakened him, "D'ye ca' me a liar?" he demanded loudly. "Fetch that auld helter," and he pointed to a rope that hung among the harness on the wall. Fear to obey, fear to refuse, were evenly matched; I stood still, looking at him. "Oh, ye'll no," he proceeded

calmly. "I'll sune learn ye to dae what ye're budden," and he rolled himself out of bed, took down and uncoiled the rope. Without warning he brought it across my thighs.

I gave a jump and a yell, and on his repeating the stroke

I cried out,

"I'll tell the master."

"Oh, ye will? So ye're a clype, ye shilpet beggar. Turn roon';" and he raised his hand again.

Bob had risen in his bed and was looking on.

"I say, Pate, that's enough," he began in expostulation; but I felt at once from his voice that there was no hope from him.

Pate's answer was a scowl and a contemptuous wave of his left hand. With the halter in the right he lashed me again and again. I howled madly and he flogged on, cursing me the while.

"Ye want to bring them frae the hoose wi' yer yowlin'; I'll learn ye a quaeter tune afore I'm dune. Will ye shut yer blasted mooth? Will ye? Will ye? "and when the strokes, falling as fast as he could draw them, had made me check my cries, he proceeded, "Will ye fetch the halter noo? Will ye? Will ye?" and to get respite from the lashes that accompanied the questions I yelled, "Ay, ay."

"Fetch it, then;" and he flung it over the peg.

I took it down and gave it into his outstretched hand.

"Turn aboot," he ordered, and I was so utterly cowed that I obeyed at once. He laid on at the back, at the sides, in tront, I turning as he bade, and when he was nearly exhausted he demanded, with a stroke at each question,

"Will ye ever wauken me again?"

' No."

"And will ye aye dae what ye're budden?"

" Ay, ay."

"And will ye dae't at ance?"

" Ay, ay."

"It'll be as weel for ye. If ye dinna, d'ye ken what I'll dae to ye? D'ye ken?" he repeated fiercely, when I did not reply.

" No."

"I'll tak' ye this way," and he brought his clenched hands together, "and I'll rive yer legs sindry."

I was like sinking on the floor with terror, and after he had

gazed at me for a while he pointed to the peg as a sign that I

was to restore the halter to its place.

That afternoon we were spreading dung in the Cairn Park. which had been in oats and was to be ploughed for potatoes. Big Pate threw out the manure from the coups, Bob and I tedded. My legs and hips were so tender from the late thrashing that I could hardly bear my clothes touching them. I limped, in spite of all my efforts to walk steadily; an onlooker would have taken me for a cripple. Pate eyed me from time to time and seemed to find a grim satisfaction in noting my frightened, tearful eyes, my constrained movements. No words of his were needed to keep me at my work: a glance was enough. Only once had he occasion to speak. When three persons are working as we were, one casting out the manure in large graipfuls which the others break up and spread, it is understood that each tedder keeps to his own side and so does just as much as his fellow. I was so stiff and sore that I began to lag, and Bob good-naturedly crossed to my side to help.
"Dae yer ain bit and let him dae his," Pate admonished

"Dae yer ain bit and let him dae his," Pate admonished him the second time this happened; "if he's no fit for his

wark, he shouldna be here."

"Please yersel'," was Bob's reply, and for the rest of the

afternoon I was left unaided.

It was not easy to keep up with Big Pate. He was working, as he usually worked, at top speed, and Bob and I had not only to follow him closely but had also to do our task to his satisfaction. Manure must be tedded till no lump is left, every part of the field must have its share, and the contents of the coups must be so evenly spread at the fringes that it should be impossible to tell where one coup ends and its neighbour begins. A look, a movement of Pate's made me jump to repair a fault as though I had been worked with a spring.

We were sorting the horses in the evening. Besides attending to the milk-cart pony, which stood in a loose-box in the boiler-house, I had to help with an odd horse, old Roy, in the stable. The first man and I usually took a side apiece when combing and brushing him. We were not long started when Pate, wanting more room to work, put his shoulder to the beast's flank, lifted him off his near legs and threw him over on me, so that I should have been crushed against the wall had I not ducked. Again and again that night, whenever he

wanted the horse shifted, he heaved him over with his shoulder. I was in terror, and could not attend to my work for watching Pate's movements and trying to guard myself. Then he would lean over the horse and bring the brush across my head, cursing me for wasting time and keeping him from his

supper.

After supper the same evening I went over to the bothy to wash my face. I meant to go up to the Home Farm and consult Dan Martin, my butty—strange that the poorest wretch has a chum—in youth !—and as the working-day was near its shortest I should have an hour with him before returning to look the pony at eight o'clock. Big Pate, I felt, had his eye on me while I was cleaning myself, and ere I was done he asked with an oath where I was bound for.

"The Hame Farm," I faltered.

"I'll find ye something better to dae. D'ye see thae dishes? Wash them up, then, or I'll wash you in the horse-pond. And if ye break a thing, by God! I'll break yer back."

Bob, who had been listening with interest, gave a laugh. "Dam't if I ever thocht o' that or I micht hae made him

dae 't lang syne."

Since I had come to Abbot's Mailing, the two men in the bothy had done their own work, taking week about as cook and dish-washer. The task of cleaning-up was now to be left to me.

It was useless to think of visiting Dannie till the horses were looked. After eight o'clock I limped away to the Home Farm.

Dannie Martin was of my age and had been in farm service for the same time—six months. His parents, who lived in Fallowkirk, a town five miles east of us, were Irish, and it would be from them, I suppose, that he drew his quick wits and lively disposition. Both the grieve and the ploughman on the Home Farm were married men, and Dannie, though he got his meals in the grieve's house, slept in a little cottage that served as bothy for a forester, the estate-carter, and himself. All three were in, and after I had sat a little I made signs to Dan that I wanted him to come outside. He stuck his cap on the back of his head, and as soon as we were on the road, he lit up, for he liked to be seen smoking. I did the same, though more for company's sake; then I hastened to tell him of Big Pate's cruelty.

"There's no an inch o' me but's marked frae the waist doon," I concluded; "I'll let ye see if ye like."

When I had turned down my socks and pulled up my drawers, Dannie kept striking matches to examine the sores.

"It's just as if ye were burnin' me wi' red-hot irons," I explained. "What wad ye advise me, Dannie?"

"Hoy-oy-oy!" yelled my chum.

It was his practice to give this yell before any lengthy utterance. This time he did not follow it up with words; he stepped into the middle of the road and I could see him in the moonlight jumping about and sparring at an invisible antagonist. For a while he had been taking boxing lessons from Hendry, the forester, who had once been a policeman.

"That's nae use," I said hopelessly, inferring his answer from the pantomime. "Man, my hert goes oot o' me the moment he gies me a look. Dannie, I see naething for 't but

to rin awa'.'

"Whaur tae?" asked my butty in his ordinary tone, which was as loud and shrill as though he were calling to someone a field's-breadth off.

"I was thinking, Patagonia."
Dannie did not speak for a little.

"That's whaur auld Sam'l Eadie has a son," he said at last,

referring to a shepherd up the moorlands.

"The very same. It was that made me think o't. Noo, here's what I've been thinkin' the day, Dannie. We micht watch for auld Sam'l gaun to the mart and ask him hoo young Sam'l got the job in Patagonia and if I wad hae ony chance."

Dan kept silence still longer than before.

"Hoy-oy-oy!" he then began. "Ye're a bloomin' idiot, Jamie; ye're as blind as a moudie."

"What way?"

"That's the very thing Pate wants—to drive ye awa' frae the place."

"Hoo that?" I asked in surprise.

"He's feared auld Nick 'll leave ye his siller; and if ye rin

awa' he'll be thinkin' to get the siller himsel'."

Now, I was aware that Big Pate and I counted kin. He was nephew, I grand-nephew, to old Nicol Gow, our present master. But that interest had anything to do with his ill-usage of me had never been in my thoughts; I had imagined that his antipathy was instinctive.

"I canna believe that," I said, when I had got over my

surprise. "Naebody wad think it worth their while."

"You've nae een in yer heid," said my friend; "but ither folk can see if you canna. Pate wants ye oot o' that to mak' sure o' the siller. And if I was you, I wad hing on just for spite, and if he meddled me I wad brain him wi' a coulter."

This again, I felt, was beyond my courage, and I implored Dannie to keep watch for the old shepherd. My friend was quite willing; he even suggested that if there was no other way of seeing old Eadie, the two of us might stroll up the moorlands on the first free Sunday. This settled, Dannie turned the talk and in the same shrill but passionless tones—as indifferent, seemingly, as if he had been speaking with an utter stranger-he discussed the topic most interesting to the countryside. The Maud Ploughing-match, the great event of the kind in the shire, was set for the Saturday before Christmas. Big Pate, who had already taken a medal at the match and was therefore ploughed out, would be guiding one of the competitors. So I had heard in the bothy. Dannie was versed in the ploughmen's records and had decided opinions as to the likely winners. He looked for a holiday on the occasion, and advised me to ask for one. But old Nicol, I knew, was not fond of granting holidays.

Ere I next saw Dannie, I had borne something worse than bodily torture and—to heighten the anguish—I durst not tell

it to my friend.

# CHAPTER II

N the second day after Big Pate's settlement at the Mailing I found the men just finishing a panful of ham when I came over after dinner.

"That ham wad hae gaen doon a d--- sicht better wi' hauf a dizzen eggs," Pate growled, rising from the

bench and taking out his pipe.

"I believe ye," said Bob; "but eggs is rather an expensive morsel the noo. Auld Phemie 'll be sellin' them at hauf a croon the dizzen."

Pate gave a curse. "Wha wants to buy them? There's plenty for the liftin' aboot a toon like this. She used to keep aboot a hunder hens; I suppose she'll hae as mony yet."

Big Pate had already served at the Mailing and had left owing to the poor fare. After a year's absence he had been induced to return, but had stipulated that he should feed himself as the second man was doing. It was easy to see why old Nicol had been anxious to get his nephew back: Big Pate was a good worker, one of the crack ploughmen of the county;

more than that, he was a capital slave-driver.

"That'll no dae, Pate," said the younger ploughman in answer to the suggestion; "it's ower risky. Man, the eggs is watched like gold." After a pause he asked, "Did ye try

on that game when ye was here afore?"

"Damn ye, what need had I? I wasna on my brose."

"I forgot, I forgot. Auld Phemie meated ye and she wad gie ye plenty o' ham-strings;" and Bob laughed again, though his neighbour's face gathered a threatening gloom. But Pate, rather to my surprise, controlled himself, and his manner was unusually civil as he said,

"At Westwater"—the farm he had served on during the past year-" I never bocht an egg. Jess Paul rubbit the nests and borrowed frae neebours as weel. I've seen me wi' five dizzen in my kist at ae time. When Jess cam' into the bothy she wad be stuffed like a pudden. I was aye feared to touch her till she was cleaned oot. Ye never tried Florrie on? "
"Florrie's no that sort," said Bob drily. "It's ower kittle

"Florrie's no that sort," said Bob drily. "It's ower kittle a game, onyway," he added in a brisker tone; "they punish

it awfu' heavy."

"Ay, when it's fun' oot."

"It wad sune be fun' oot the noo, for the hens 'll no be layin' weel at this time o' year and the eggs wad sune be missed. Na, I wadna venture 't?"

"But ye wad eat the eggs if they were there," his neighbour

growled.

"That's anither story. But I see nae way o' gettin' them there;" and Bob lounged over to the bed, stretched himself out on it, and proceeded to light his pipe.

Pate remained standing before the fire.

"Come here," he ordered in his deep voice, and I got down from the other bed on which I had been sitting and came forward shrinkingly.

"Whaur dae the hens maistly lay?"

"In the hen-hoose."

Pate caught me a sounding blow on the head that sent me staggering against the bed-front. He cursed me for an idiot and demanded if I thought he was the same.

"Whaur else dae they lay?" he questioned, when he saw

me in mortal fear.

"Twa three lay in the mill-ring, roon' the top o' the wa's, and—and—and ane, a yellow ane, has been sittin' in the bull's lowse-box, in the heck, this week. I was gaun to tell the mistress about it."

"Ay. Weel, ye needna fash." He drew his watch from his fob. "Awa" into the lowse-box and coont the eggs. But

dinna touch them the noo. D'ye hear?"

The hen had made a nest of hay in the very corner of the hack where the red bull could not pull out the fodder. There were five eggs, quite warm.

"Noo," said Pate, when I brought the report, "ye'll whip awa' fowr o' thae eggs as sune's ye're dune wi' yer supper the

nicht, the minute ye're dune. Will ye?"

Despite my terror of him I could not answer. There were awful penalties—what exactly they were I had not heard—for this offence. As I stood trembling, Big Pate advanced a step.

"D'ye want me to tear ye joint frae joint?" and he held me by the shoulder. "Will ye?"

I had to promise.

"Mind this," Pate cautioned me; "if ony o' them see ye—though they're no likely to be about at the time—say the hen was layin' awa' and ye was takin' the eggs to the mistress."

The visit to the loose-box that night was a terrible experience. It was not the guilt that dismayed me: it was the danger. As I slipped the eggs through the spars and lodged them in the pockets of my sleeve-waistcoat, I felt that the red bull, sprawling on the litter with his unwieldy bulk, understood the deed and would tell. In the dark byre through which I stole, keeping my hands in my pockets to hold the eggs apart, every deep breath that a cow fetched, every rattle of the chain at her head, made my heart leap. The journey to the bothy, little over a score of yards, seemed miles.

The two men were waiting expectantly. Big Pate grabbed

the eggs and set them under a bowl.

"Lash on the butter," he called with an oath; and Bob cut a wedge of fresh butter into the pan which he pushed on to

the fire, chuckling the while.

Bob was a tall, loosely-built fellow of five-and-twenty, with sandy hair and bronzed face. He was a simple youth, with neither the head nor the hands of a skilful ploughman, though he worked well enough under proper direction.

"God's sake! they'll hear us," he laughed, as Pate, taking the eggs one by one, split them into the pan and raised a great

spluttering.

"Awa' ootby and hing aboot the door and gie a kick wi' yer foot if onybody looks near," Pate ordered me, while he

rammed the eggs-shells under the pan.

Nobody stirred at the house except Florrie, who fetched some water from the pump in her zinc pail. The rattle of dishes went on inside the bothy, accompanied by laughing outbursts from Bob and an occasional complacent grunt from his neighbour.

"Come in," Pate ordered me after a while.

The men's supper was over. On the table stood a bottle of essence of coffee, two empty bowls with treacle-like stains inside, two half-loaves well cut into, a cotton bag of sugar, a milk-jug, and two plates. On one of these a morsel of fried egg was lying.

"Ram that into ye," said Pate; and when I obeyed readily enough, for my supper had not been too heavy, he went on, "Noo, you're airt and pairt, and if ever ye cheep, we'll sweer baith o' us, that ye prigged the eggs for yersel', for ye wasna content wi' the meat in the hoose." After giving time to let the threat sink into me, he proceeded, "Noo, one hen canna keep us gaun' though she laid every day. Ye'll hae twa eggs to the piece o' us; d'ye hear?"

This was so manifestly impossible that I ventured to say,

"Hoo can I-manage it?"

"I'll learn ye to manage it; I'll easily learn ye that. Fetch that helter."

"I'll dae 't, I'll dae 't," I cried out.

"Fetch that helter," he repeated sternly, and when he had loosened it he doubled me over his knee. "This is hoo ye'll manage it," and he brought the rope over my thighs, still raw from yesterday's flogging. "Will ye manage it noo, d'ye think? Will ye? Will ye?" and to escape the unbearable torture I assented to everything. "Mind this," was Pate's final warning; "it's no enough to dae what ye're budden; ye've got to dae 't withoot a word."

On my return from Craigkenneth the next morning Pate demanded how many eggs I had got. He and Bob were at breakfast, being late of yoking on the dark mornings. Seeing

my hesitation, he asked sternly,

"Ye dinna mean to say ye've got nane?"

"No yet," I whimpered.

"Then if the fowr eggs are no ready by supper-time I'll tak' a wrench and pu' oot ane o' yer front teeth for every egg that's awantin'. The time for you to skin them is the early morning, when Florrie and the auld bitch are in the byre, or just the noo, after yer breakfast." He had been speaking calmly though sternly; now he roared like a lion, "Will ye mind? Will ye mind?" and on my promising obedience, "Awa' this minute, then, and see what ye can dae. And hide them some place whaur naebody 'll come on them; no in the bothy."

I had to start on the search at once. The hen in the loose-box had laid again; I took one egg, leaving one as before. Then I ventured a run into the hen-house and robbed a nest. By this it was yoking-time. I hid the booty on the inside wall of the boiler-house, reaching the place by climbing the

side of the loose-box where the pony stood. At dinner-time I was again on the prowl and captured an egg in the milk-ring. One or two hens laid in the hay and straw of the barn; I got

the fourth egg there.

Even a youngster like myself could see that this would not last. If so many eggs had to be pilfered at a season when few hens were laying, there must be system in the theft. I roamed about the steading whenever I had a spare minute and marked the spots that the hens frequented. One was the loft above the smaller barn, another was the caff-neuk, opening off the same barn. Indeed, this was a favourite place; whenever the door happened to be left open the hens were in and busy among the chaff. I made nests in all the likely corners about the farm, putting a stolen egg in each nest for a start, and ere long I had five hens laying in spots unknown to the mistress. From these I could count on two eggs a day; the other two

I had to find anyhow.

Had the mistress any suspicion? Old Phemie, who kept house for her bachelor brother, was not easy to read. She was a pleasant-looking woman, for, though her face was wrinkled and her shoulders were bent with incessant work, her cheeks were fresh, her dark eyes full and bright, her nose and mouth well-shaped, and when she talked with outsiders she wore a constant smile. Her words were as smooth, her manner as soft as butter; yet her heart was stone. She had no love except for gain, and though I was a mere child and kin to herself, she would have coined my heart's-blood. It seemed to me, as the plundering went on, that she was puzzled and was watching the poultry with more than common care. Once, even, I heard her speak her doubts, and while my guilty conscience made me tremble I listened closely, knowing that if fully warned I should run the less risk. It was early one morning when old Phemie and the maid were in the byre. The milk-cart was yoked and I was ready to start for Craigkenneth. Florrie, however, was hardly finished and I wandered about the byre till she was ready. The mistress stood near her, looking thoughtful.

"I'll no can mak' oot the six dizzen the morn," she observed, referring to the eggs which I took in to the Craigkenneth dairy, "unless the hens lay better than they've been daein'."

Florrie did not answer at once. The black-and-white Ayrshire she was milking had been fractious in spite of Florrie's

threats and coaxing, and, just as the mistress spoke, the beast kicked the can and nearly upset it. Florrie drew a long inward breath and her face hardened. She set the can in the gangway

and returned to the cow.

"That's yer trick, ye bitch;" and with her neat, strong little shoes she drew the cow a kick in the belly. "You would keep folk at yer ether a' day and scale the can to the bargain! My leddy, I'll learn ye whether you or me 's mistress," and in spite of old Phemie's remonstrances, "Ye'll kill the beast," "She's quite tractable for ordinar'," "She's as quaet a beast as is in the byre," Florrie kicked again and again with her full strength till Pyet trembled, as I did under Big Pate's halter. It was only when Florrie had resumed her stool, fixed the can between her knees and stuck her forehead into the cow's quivering flank that she answered the mistress's remark about the hens.

"Ye've ower mony summer layers and ower few winter anes. If ye had mair Buff Orpingtons and Plymouth Rocks ye wad be gettin' eggs the noo when prices are guid."

"I'm no gettin' an egg frae yer Orpingtons and yer Plymouth

Rocks," the old woman retorted with unusual asperity.

"Hoo d'ye ken?"

"Because it's a' white eggs I'm gettin', no a broon egg

among them."

"I canna understand that," said Florrie, "for I was noticing some o' that Orpingtons yesterday; their comb was fair scarlet."

"I noticed that tae, but they're no layin' a' the same." Florrie did not answer, and after a short silence the mistress ended the dialogue by saying in a reflective tone, "I think I'll change their feedin' for a while. I'll stop the India corn a'thegither and try them wi' a pickle rice. I've seen rice dae wonders."

And sure enough brown eggs were soon forthcoming. But this was because I was giving their layers a respite and was

seeking my booty elsewhere.

But how was it to end? How was it all to end? The thought haunted me in my lonely seasons, as I drove Prince into Craigkenneth and home in the cold dark mornings, as I mucked the byre on my return, as I lay at night between Big Pate and the wall, dog-tired with the long hours and the hard work, yet unable to sleep for the weals that burned my flesh.

How could I escape his cruelty? Was any escape possible? Some day I should die under his kicks and blows and floggings, or, worse, I should get my limbs or my back broken and be a cripple or a hunchback for life. No use complaining to the master or the mistress; they did not care though I were beaten to death before their eyes; their one concern was to get their work done. Bob could not help me even if he had wanted; he was frightened of his giant neighbour. From Florrie, who had been rather good to me during my first half-year, I soon ceased to expect help or even sympathy. She was understood to be Bob's sweetheart, yet I discovered she was carrying on with Big Pate as well. Complain to the police? Farm-hands, I knew, never bothered with the police: everyone had to protect himself. Besides, since I had become a thief I was afraid of the police. What could I do? Could I do anything?

A night or two before the Maud Ploughing-match, when I had endured Big Pate's ill-usage for three weeks, Dannie Martin came up to see me. He had fallen in with the old shepherd at the mart and had asked about the son in South America. Young Sam'l had got the appointment by answering an advertisement in a Glasgow paper, and the passage out had cost him nothing as he had been in charge of a cargo of cattle. After being a year or two with a stock-raising company he had started for himself and now owned a big farm. My plan, Dannie thought, was to advertise in the same paper.

When I made no response, he went on,

"I wad gang oot wi' ye, but I can mak' my way at hame. I'll be a factor some o' that days and be upsides wi' auld Meiklejohn, the d—— sneck-drawer."

Dannie had been refused a holiday for the ploughing-match and was bitter against the factor, whom he thought mainly to blame.

"Hoo wad Teen Gillies dae for a factor's wife?" I asked, Dannie's talk having made me forget my sorrows for the moment. Teen was a little maid at the neighbouring farm

of Lowis Mains and very friendly with us both.

"Hoy-oy-oy! I care as much for Teen Gillies as for that pipe-stapple. Na. I'll wait till I get among the gentry and I'll marry a laird's dochter—Miss Maymie, mebbe, if she's no ower auld and wizened. But you're no up to that, Jamie. So you should put in an advertisement at ance. I'll help ye to draw it up."

"I think, Dannie," I said with some hesitation, "we needna

heed; I'll no bother."

"Nae bother," my friend assured me. "I'll tell ye what to say, and you can put it in yer ain words and write it oot. Ye're fully as guid as me at that bit o't."

Dannie had an undue respect for my scholarship. It was

the one point in which he acknowledged my superiority.

"If I could write and put things thegither like you," he often declared, "by God! I wadna be muckin' byres."

When he failed to remark my coldness about the project,

I had to be more explicit.

"I've kind o' changed my mind, Dan. I think I wadna care to gang to Patagonia."

"It was yersel' that thocht o't."

"I ken that; but I've rather gien up the notion."

"D'ye think it's ower faur awa'?"

"Ay," I answered hesitatingly. "I—I wadna care to leave the district."

"Please yersel'," said my friend, with his usual indifference. "The district's weel enough if ye're weel used. But I wadna

wait here or ony ither gate to be hashed as you are."

But I could not tell him why, in spite of the awful cruelty I suffered, I had lately become so much attached to the district.

# CHAPTER III

HEN my passion for Miss Maymie had grown so strong as to master my being I would fondly go back in memory and ask myself when and where I had seen her first. The answer was always doubtful, for, strange as others may think it, I was familiar with her appearance ere she impressed me deeply, if at all. During my first half-year of farmservice, in the latter part of it especially, the admiral and his family had been much at home, and Miss Maymie had often been down the Lang Stracht, when I was within view. Sometimes even I must have heard her talking, for I can recall days when she passed close to me in company with friends. And it may be that this familiarity with her beauty and grace was preparing me to become her slave. Still, she was as yet little more to me than any other fine lady might have been, her sister or a companion, for instance. So that, try as I might, I could never be sure of the first time I had set eyes on my beloved.

But the time when she became all the world to me—this I know to an hour. In the first week of December Bob and I were in Craigkenneth one afternoon with two loads of potatoes, and while Bob was in a shop for tobacco and I watched the horses, Miss Maymie went by with a young lady-friend? Rain had begun to fall and the ladies were hurrying for shelter. As they passed, I heard the visitor remark that it did not look well to be running along the public street, to which Miss Maymie replied in her bright chuckling voice, "Oh, bother

appearances!"

The very next day I was working near the road covering some potato-pits with shaws, when Miss Maymie rode down the Lang Stracht in her father's company. They were walking their horses, and I heard Miss Maymie ask, "What

view does this remind you of, papa?" And when the admiral gave it up and put the question to her, she answered, so far as I could make it out, "Often told."

Looking back, I could see that from then she was my queen. This would be partly due to my being near her those two times in close succession. There was something more. In the summer, when I was seeing her often, I had been free from any great sorrow. All was now changed. Pate's cruelty had filled my life with gloom. Was it, then, that my heart was open for some new, some strange emotion? It is like. At any rate, Miss Maymie was my mistress from that hour, and I can truthfully say that, except when I was harassed by work or cruelty or was too tired to think of anything, she was for ever in my thoughts. People who are older and wiser will know the danger of giving one idea mastery of the mind and will struggle against it. So far from struggling, I welcomed it, indulged it, cherished it, as my one joy. From now, I lived in two worlds: the outer, in which I toiled and suffered and from which I tried to keep my thoughts away; a new inward world of fancy where Miss Maymie and I dwelt alone. Here I was free, bold, happy. What talks we had! How we read each other's looks, ay, each other's thoughts! Never did I put hand to a task but Miss Maymie was an onlooker, never did I speak but she was listening, and it was for her I spoke. How often, how naturally did I picture her in danger and myself appearing at the right moment to save her! For this is to be noted: our relations were always high, heroic, chivalrous; never did the image of my queen suggest one impure longing. This, I say, is noteworthy; for I was no purer than other lads of my station. Like farm-youngsters of both sexes, I had been corrupted by my elders and I indulged in obscene talk without a scruple. When wee Teen Gillies was in my mind or in my company, my thoughts, my words were low enough. But with my mistress I lived in another world, sharing her pure thoughts and even expressing them in her diction and accent. And what, may ask someone who has never known infatuation like mine-what were my hopes? She was the laird's daughter, well born, rich, beautiful, worthy to be a noble's bride, and I—I was a farmlad with five pounds for my half-year's fee, the meanest creature on her father's lands. She, too, refined, elegant, accomplished; I with only my few years' schooling and a wild imagination that, far from being a stay or guide, was like to be my curse. Even had other things matched, as they were far, so far, from matching, the disparity in years was ludicrous. I was not yet fifteen and she was woman-grown. What did I hope for, look for? The question is altogether impertinent; it was never in my thoughts. My queen and I had found each other, we were one; that was all I knew. Worldly schemes, plans for the future—what were they? It may be asked, more pertinently, on what food did fancy nourish itself? The fare was scanty but all-sufficient. On Sundays, the only days I had leisure, I haunted the neighbourhood of Lowis House, ostensibly for Dannie Martin's company, and I had an occasional glimpse of Miss Maymie, sometimes even heard her voice. At odd times she would pass within view, driving, walking, cycling, oftener riding, while I worked in the fields. Then her name was mentioned. though seldom, by the farmer's people when I was by. Above all, I heard of her from Dannie. Slyly, stealthily, in some roundabout way I would lead on, speaking of the admiral, maybe, or even Miss Seton, in hope that my companion would of himself come out with the loved name. If he did, I could hold the talk to that theme without raising suspicion; if he failed, I too was silent. For with all my wild rage of passion I had a strange secretiveness; I dreaded discovery and would have shrunk from confession. Stranger still, I had a morbid self-torturing pride in concealing its signs from the lady herself. On the rare occasions when I encountered her I held my head high and aside, feigning the indifferent. Terribly trying that was to me; my heart would stop as though it would never beat more, and then would bound like to leap from my breast. Why could I not glance at her admiringly, comprehensively, as I was yearning to do? Why not take some attitude likely to draw her notice? Timidity due to my upbringing prevented me, still more the secretiveness common, I think, to boyish lovers. And yet, strange contradiction! I believed, and revelled in the belief, that my mistress knew of my love.

Was there something peculiar to my nature that made imagination run wild? With me, at least, it rioted unchecked. Perhaps my untoward circumstances were a blessing; they called my thoughts away at times, or even suspended thought altogether, and so, it may be, saved my reason. Big Pate's

cruelty, the wearing toil and long hours that used up my strength—these would at intervals veil Miss Maymie's image from my consciousness. But it was always in my mind, and no sooner was the bodily strain relaxed than the fair picture reappeared. One thing alone would have saved meabsence. Had I been taken from her neighbourhood, transported to new scenes, I should have been delivered in time. Dannie was wiser than he knew in urging Patagonia. For change of surroundings was essential. It was no help, it did harm, if my mistress was away and I was left. Sometimes she was from home that winter, and till she returned there was no life in me. Merely to know that she was near, that I had a chance of seeing her, was comfort unspeakable. And oh! what wild delicious dreams I indulged if I was alone and neither too tired nor too tortured for my fancy to work! At night, lying behind Big Pate, whose snoring seemed to shake the walls, I kept sleep away, I lived more strenuously than in daylight hours. Another chance was in my morning drive to Craigkenneth—the outward journey only, for I could not dream with the same delightful freedom when Prince's head was turned to home and to Big Pate. On the outward journey all things favoured me. The pony was surefooted, needing no attention; few vehicles were moving at that dark hour. Indeed, the road was not a stirring one at any time. The only house on the Lang Stracht, and it was near the foot, was Cambuslochan, owned by a gentlemanfarmer called Ralston. Where the stracht joined the main road was the hamlet of Lucas, with the parish church, and public-house and a few cottages. Whistleton smithy was a mile further on, and except for half a dozen isolated dwellings there was no sign of human neighbourhood till the outskirts of Craigkenneth were reached. For three-quarters of an hour, then, with the darkness round me like a wall, I could dream at ease. Cold and gloom without; within, a world of warm, radiant fancies. How imagination made up for the actual chances I had lost through diffidence! Now, I was the fearless lover, talking, listening at my ease, walking with my loved one hand-in-hand, kissing her golden hair. Wild rhapsodies-poetry, I called them-would burst from me. and though I seldom committed them to paper they were not readily forgotten. And-how ridiculous it seems now !to crown these ecstasies, I almost invariably found myself

addressing Miss Maymie in a couplet that must have stuck to my memory from school:

"The moon by night thee shall not smite, Nor yet the sun by day."

To repeat these lines inwardly, sometimes aloud, gave me relief, joy. They satisfied me; they spoke my transports better than any words I could find elsewhere or fashion for

myself. Why? I cannot say, I cannot say.

So it came that the web of my days, black as mourning weeds, was lightened with a thread of gold, and it will now be understood why I remained at the Mailing though a fiend plied his tortures to drive me away. I could not go. A power held me stronger than regard for my comfort, for my life. To leave the district was to leave Miss Maymie. I

could as soon have torn out my heart.

Yet the passion for my mistress, if it sustained me to abide inhuman treatment, rendered my sufferings more poignant. For I had the feeling that one who was linked to her by love ought to be free and fearless. Had I been living even as I was the first half-year, with no tyrant over me, I might have aspired to such worthiness. In my present bondage how could I hope? What courage I once boasted was leaving me. A sudden word, not from Pate only but from anyone, made me start; I knew that fear looked from my eyes. And this would continue and get worse; no end, no respite. Then, more dreadful than the suffering was the risk I ran of disgrace. Pate had forced me to become a thief, and any day I might be caught and exposed. Oh, the shame! Miss Maymie's lover to be jailed—and for what? For egg-stealing! The story would be given in the papers, she would read it, and her eyes would flash anger, her lips would wreathe with scorn. Her lover a thief! For, as I say, I had the conviction that she knew of my love and in a measure returned it. The passion so possessed my soul that it was bound to reveal itself unspoken to its object. And she could not remain indifferent; she was so much to me that I must be something to her. With reason, then, would she flash scorn and wrath on finding that her love had been won by a thief.

Not here only did the thought of my beloved teach me my own unworthiness. An early instance of her power occurred in a scene the most unlikely. Dannie Martin, as I mentioned, had been denied a holiday for the Maud Ploughing-match.

He and I went into Craigkenneth, however, that night, as we invariably did on the Saturdays. The night was spent in the usual way, in loafing about the steeple, talking with our mates, smoking, visiting the public-house. The streets were a shade rougher than common, for the ploughing-match had been put off at the last moment owing to frost, and the ploughmen who had the holiday had spent most of their time drinking. Big Pate was of the number, and he was in a specially savage temper because, unlike some of his mates, he had heard nothing about the postponement and had gone out to Maud a fruitless errand. He had come back to Craigkenneth ready for a day's debauchery. All this was told us by our chums, and every new story was an excuse for a visit to the public-house. To be just both to Dan and myself, we were not given to frequenting bars; ice-cream saloons, even pieshops, offered refreshments more to our mind. This night. however, we were in three public-houses, the last situated in a wynd of the Old Town. It was late, near closing-time; the half-moon bar was thronged with roughs, some of them foreigners, the din was deafening. For once I was not thinking of my queen; the beer had driven her from my head. As our group of farm-lads was talking of departure, Dannie took a match from the counter to relight his pipe. Between the puffs he thrilled me with the words,

"Miss Maymie was on me aboot smokin' the ither day."

"Get away!" I said, when I could speak.

"Sure's death! Just the day afore yesterday. I was takin' roon' the horses for a drink when her and Colonel Sessions gaed by. Rare size o' a man, yon—seeven feet if he's an inch, and wi' a voice like a bull. His leg—he had on knickerbockers—"

"But what aboot the smokin'?"

"Ay. Weel, him and Miss Maymie was gaun by and I was haein' a draw efter my dinner. So Miss Maymie says, 'Oh, look there, Colonel Sessions! Tell him he'll never be a man if he smokes so young,'" and Dannie mimicked the young lady's accent.

"What mair, Dannie?"

"The colonel gied a kin' o' lauch and says, 'It strikes me he thinks himself a man already. Eh—ah—may I offah you a cigah?' and he pretended to tak' something oot o' his jacket-pooch. Just coddin'."

"And—and what did Miss Maymie say?"
"Lauched like to burst her buttons."

At the first mention of Miss Maymie's name the beer had left my head. I was thinking clearly enough by the time Dannie was done. Suppose my queen were to see me now! In this reeking den, amid this cursing crew! Myself with a short, dirty clay between my teeth and a half-tumbler of muddy ale before me! To breathe her name in such a scene, ay, to keep a thought of her in the heart, was profanation. I stood troubled, shamed, and while a barman was endeavouring to edge the drinkers to the door I took advantage of the confusion to let the pipe fall from my mouth.

"I'll get it," Dannie volunteered, trying to keep the stream of topers off the spot where it lay. "Damn ye, d'ye no see the man's pipe?" he demanded of a sailor-looking fellow

thrice his size.

But I told him not to mind.

"Let's oot afore the crush;" and without waiting to see if I was followed I made resolutely for the door.

### CHAPTER IV

HERE would be nearly a score of us going home together that night. Big Pate was very drunk. He had spent part of the day, I overheard Bob tell, in a low howff of the Wynds and had got into a row over some money which he alleged the women of the place had stolen. All the men in our company were more or less drunk; the women, though they had tasted, were sober except one—May Gentles, whose husband was second pair on a place above Lowis House. Everybody, man or woman, was talking or rather shouting, and, as if this was not din enough, an under-gardener from Lowis House was practising on a new concertina, while Bauldy Aitken, another unmarried man from up the country, though too drunk to walk unsupported, sang all the way a bothy-song then in vogue:

"I am frae the North, as you may see,
On excursion come to town;
All the girls they smile on me,
But the gentlemen on me frown.
What care I howe'er they grumble?
I pay my way and croosely craw,
And when I go about, the boys all shout
'It's the Cock o' the North in his feathers braw.'

Chorus .- " Up for the doodle-doodle-doo," etc.

The country road, under the keen starry heavens, became a babel.

Almost from the time of leaving Craigkenneth, May Gentles' husband, a silly yokel, had been chaffing Bob about the disappointment over the ploughing-match. Old Nicol's agreement, which, however, he might not enforce, had been that if his men got a holiday for Maud they would not have the day when the local match came round in January. Gentles,

who was keeping up for the Lucas match, was loudly praying that Nick would hold his men to the bargain. He cast up everything that was likely to irritate his neighbour. His own master, so he said, was not only paying his entry-money for the Lucas match but had promised him a few shillings for decorations, whereas Bob had been wasting his money on train-fares and would find himself short ere next payday.

"But it's as weel," he went on, finding new matter for provocation; "it's as weel ye're no to be haudin' at Lucas. Oor new mear wad tak' the shine oot o' you mangy brute o'

vours."

Bob was good-natured in drink and he kept his temper, but at this point Big Pate joined in the altercation. He had seemed too drunk for speech, and it was a surprise to most when he demanded in almost as steady a voice as usual,

"What mangy brute?"

"That bay mear o' yours. There's been an awfu' blawin' at the Mailing thae last twa year because she got first for the best mear on the field. Man, she had naething to compete against. Wait till that new mear o' oors gets alangside o' her. Have ye seen her yet?"

"I have."

"And what d'ye think o' her?"

"Damned little o' her and a damned sicht less o' the man that works her."

The two had come to a stand and were facing each other. In his sober senses Wull Gentles would never have dared to bait his giant neighbour. Now he said boldly,

"He's mebbe as guid a man as ony at the Mailing."
"Show it, then," and Pate, trying to hold himself erect, put up his fists.

"We can mebbe show-" the other began when Pate's left hand caught him on the mouth. He staggered back but

did not fall. His mouth was red.

Bob, who had been arming Pate along from the town, instantly drew up alongside his leader; the young gardener, waiting only to shove his concertina into its case and lay it on the roadside, did the same. An unmarried ploughman from a farm beside Gentles' took his place by his friend, though with less alacrity, while Bauldy Aitken, in front with the women, continued his strain:

"Now as I was walking down the street,
Very peckish I did feel;
Thinks I, I'll go into a cook-shop
And get mysel' a right good meal.
When I gaed in afore the coonter,
The maister cries to the waiters a',
Get a yaird o' tripe as fast as ye like,
It's the Cock o' the North in his feathers braw.

Chorus.—" Up for the doodle-doodle doo, Down for the diddle-diddle-die, Up for the," etc.

But Gentles' little boy, who had been walking beside his father, had sped forward at the first blow and alarmed the women. They ran back screaming and the noise of their approach made the combatants pause. Ere they could engage, May pushed between them.

"Wha's meddlin' wi' my ane? Is't you, ye big black-a-vised devil? Come on, then, if ye daur. If Wull's ower drunk to fecht, I'm sober enough," and she squared up to

Pate like any man.

The men roared with laughter and encouraged May to the combat, offering odds on her. Big Pate seemed nonplussed and, as he stood looking at the Amazon, the other women rushed up, caught both May and her husband and hurried them off. To keep his mate from following, Bob produced a mutchkin bottle of whisky and handed it round. Another ploughman did the same a few minutes later. Then we moved on.

All this had happened near Whistleton smithy. The cottage next the smithy was a Cyclists' Rest. Big Pate stopped and looked back. He had probably noticed me during the dispute, for I had drawn closer to him then, knowing there was little danger.

"Here, ye white-faced beggar, awa' in there and get us pies apiece;" and he handed me a florin. "Look sharp or

I'll tear yer liver oot."

The group had not gone many yards when I overtook them. Big Pate stared at the florin which I held out.

"What the ——'s this?"

"I couldna get ony," I faltered; "the pies are a' dune."
He took the coin in one hand, with the other he seized me
by the bottom of the waistcoat and, uttering awful curses,

"I'll better murder ye and be dune wi't," he said.

Baulked in his vengeance on Gentles, he would mean to sate it on me, his usual victim. He lifted me from the ground without an effort. A wall of fair height skirted the road opposite the Cyclists' Rest. "Once, twice," Pate slowly counted, swinging my body in the air before launching me over.

I had uttered a wild shriek on divining his purpose, and in a flash I remembered that somewhere thereabouts was an old quarry with a deep, green-mantled, fearsome pool. It might be at the very spot; that would be my grave. I gave but the one shriek, made but the one struggle; then the dread of hurtling through the air and striking the deathly water

overpowered my senses. I knew nothing more.

After a long interval—it might be hours, it might be years—consciousness came back, like the blood returning to a numbed limb. Where I was—in life or in the grave—I could not tell. Presently I felt myself being roughly shaken and was aware of a voice imploring me to "wauken up." The voice was familiar and after a time I placed it as Dannie Martin's. Opening my eyes I caught the gleam of stars—another token that I was still amongst the living. Ere long the shaking was repeated, the voice renewed its pleading, and I then gathered strength to ask,

"Did he throw me in?"

"Throw ye ower, ye mean? No, no; ye're a'richt. But try, for God's sake, to rise or I'll be frozen to death as weel's

yersel'."

Had I felt comfortable, I should never have risen; I felt so disinclined for effort. It was the cold that forced me to move. I rose with Dannie's help and, holding by his arm, I staggered on, while he related what had happened during my spell of senselessness. Big Pate had really meant to toss me over the wall, but as he was preparing for the final heave the young gardener had come behind and knocked the legs from him. Pate crashed to the ground, I in his arms. When he got up he left me lying and started after the gardener. He was so drunk, however, that little harm was likely to follow.

As Dannie chattered on, I became aware that my scanty strength was ebbing once more, and ere we were many yards up the Lang Stracht I sank by the roadside. My friend coaxed, prayed, remonstrated; all was useless; I could not stir. He waited in hope that some late straggler would pass, and at times he whistled and called to some of our company

whose shouts and songs could still be heard. At last he proposed going up to Cambuslochan for help; the house was near and the windows were lighted. By this time I was past speaking; I had not strength even to form a wish; all I cared for was to be left in peace. Dannie did not leave me long, however; he was back in a few minutes and brought a helper, whom I knew for Mr. Ralston himself. I felt the gentleman lift me in his strong arms and carry me up the short avenue and into the kitchen, where he set me in an arm-chair before a glowing fire. Though I was so weak I had not lost my senses; I knew what was passing and recognised the people about me. The maid was in the kitchen when we entered, and a minute later the mistress appeared. She was a young, tall, pretty lady, and still a bride, for Mr. Ralston, though a man of forty, was only a few months married.

"There's both coffee and brandy here, Alec," said the young

lady.

"A little of both won't hurt him," her husband said; and I watched her, as in a dream, pouring coffee into a cup and adding the brandy. When she was for handing it to her husband, "You give it, dear," he said.

The one wished to leave the gracious office to the other. I understood them; Miss Maymie and I had been through all

that.

The young lady held the cup to my lips while Mr. Ralston encouraged me to drink. After a mouthful or two I could hold it myself, and the tide of life began to flow steadily and swiftly back. It was evident to me that Dannie had already explained the cause of my weakness, for my kind friends asked no questions; indeed, they only waited to be assured that I was myself again. I was told to rest myself thoroughly, and the maid got orders to give Dan some supper. Then the pair left us, having friends to attend to, as we learned from the maid, and only returned when I had so well regained my strength that I spoke of moving.

"I think you should stay here for the night," the young lady said kindly, and her husband assured me that he would explain things to Mr. Gow; but I felt I had been trouble enough, so I thanked them and said I was quite fit for walking.

"I'll see him up the road, anyway," Mr. Ralston said to his wife; and she brought his greatcoat and helped him on with it.

When the three of us were outside, Mr. Ralston, who had taken my arm to support me, talked with us of farm affairsthe ploughing that was already done and so on; then, changing his tone and addressing me by name, he asked,

"Do you never think of leaving the Mailing? You're not very well used, I'm afraid. My wife's people have a farm in Fife, and I've no doubt they would find work for you.

Wouldn't you rather be there?"

Not knowing well how to decline I was silent, but my butty answered for me. Dannie, talkative enough with his own kind, was sheepish among better-class people, more sheepish far than I, and in the kitchen at Cambuslochan, when the lady was by, he had scarcely spoken a word. Mr. Ralston's homely talk had restored his confidence.

"I was advisin' him to that mysel'," he said, "but he'll no hear tell o't. The fact is, Mr. Ralston, he's fond o' the

district."

"Yes?" queried the gentleman; and I detected a shade of interest as well as amusement in his tone. "Well, I'm fond of the district myself. Only, I don't like to know of anyone being ill-used." After a little he resumed, "Something should be done, at any rate. You ought to tell Mr.

Gow about Mackinlay's treatment."

"The fact is, Mr. Ralston," my chum again interposed,
"auld Nick—I mean, Mr. Gow, disna gie a damn—I mean, disna care a button though Jamie was killed afore his lookin' een. A' he cares aboot is to get plenty o' wark oot o'

The gentleman gave a half-laugh, half-sigh. "Maybe he would pay more attention if I spoke to him," he suggested

after another pause.

"I've thocht aboot that mysel'," said Dannie complacently; "but I doot Jamie there wadna care for 't. He micht be feared Big Pate wad pay him back for clypin'. Isn't that sae, Jamie?" he asked patronisingly.

I said, "Yes, I would rather not tell"; and our friend, seeing, I suppose, that it was not easy to render help, could only

remark that he wished something could be done.

He had accompanied us to the mouth of the loan and he

stood a moment to bid us good-night.
"I'm glad, at any rate," he said ere turning away, "that the two of you stick so well together. Help him all you can,"

he said to my chum, "as you did to-night, and I've no doubt

Jamie will stand by you."

Just at the loan-mouth two dark figures were lying on the grassy bank. The one was little Bauldy, the other we did not need to scrutinise, for a concertina rested in his lap. They were sleeping heavily and did not stir when my friend gave his loudest "Hoy-oy-oy" at their ear. Dannie and I should have parted here, he holding up the Lang Stracht and I turning aside to the Mailing; but the vision of Big Pate waiting me and ready to finish his murderous work unnerved me again, and I begged my chum to convey me to the bothy. Mr. Ralston's parting counsel might still be working in Dannie's mind; at any rate, he merely uttered another yell and accompanied me without demur. In the bothy all was quiet. Dannie entered boldly, and hearing nothing I followed. The fire was out, but by the light of a stable-lantern I could see Big Pate lying above the clothes with only his boots off. Though he was snoring loudly I durst not go near him.

"Bob," I whispered, stealing over to the other bed.

"Wha's there?"

"It's me-Jamie. I say, Bob, ye micht let us lie in your bed for a nicht."

But Bob had a young ploughman in with him and wanted no other bedfellow.

"Slip in at Pate's back; he'll never move; he's that drunk he couldna kill a flee."

Dannie, impatient to be home, gave me the same advice, and I obeyed at last, though I kept my clothes on, ready to escape at a hint of danger. Had the cold been less keen, I should have lain in the cart-shed.

In spite of my tiredness I did not sleep. The incidents of the night occupied my thoughts till Miss Maymie appeared and resumed her sway.

It must have been the small hours of morning and I had fallen into a drowse when sounds from the road roused me.

"There's that daft beggar, Bauldy," I heard Bob mutter with a curse; and I soon distinguished the notes of a concertina accompanying a voice which shouted the familiar strain:

<sup>&</sup>quot;Up for the doodle-doodle-doo,
Down for the diddle-diddle-die," etc.

A few minutes more and the two musicians staggered in Bauldy waving his arms about as he sang:

"At this my blood began to boil;
And I hit the haddock on the snout.

Says he to a policeman, 'Come here, my man,
And help me to fling this rooster out.'

They took me up before the Bailie,
And two pund ten he made me draw;
'Because,' says he, 'it's plain to see
Ye're the Cock o' the North in yer feathers braw.'

Up for the,'' etc.

Bob and Tam Bayne raised themselves in the bed and exchanged rough greetings with the new-comers. Soon Bauldy came over and tried to shake Big Pate into consciousness. The giant awoke at last and in better humour than most of us expected. Little Bauldy could take liberties with him; indeed, he was a general favourite. He was a short, square-built, merry-faced fellow, utterly careless for the future and ready at any time to share his last sixpence with friend or stranger. Each of the visitors had his bottle; Bauldy carried two, one of them unbroken. As the bottle circulated, a ploughman would take it in his hand, using his thumb as a cork, give it a wild flourish to make the liquor gurgle, and ere putting it to his lips would call a ploughman's toast, of which this is the most decent sample:

"Here's to the coulter and sock,
Here's to the brechan and hames,
Here's to the bonnie bit lassie
That lies in her ploughman's arms."

"Eh, ye——" "Ye're there, ye auld——" were the common salutations. The row at Lucas came up. "Wull Gentles! he's a damned shadow," said one. "I wadna lay my haun on sic an image," said another. Then the talk was of horses.

"Is you broon mear o' yours in foal?" Big Pate asked.
"I say so," replied Bayne, "though the boys up by have bets on baith sides."

"She's no in foal; I'll haud ye a croon."

"Ye're a liar, then; for I saw the foal movin'."

Big Pate, who had been pretty sober on waking, took umbrage at the remark, and catching Tam Bayne by the throat held him at arm's length:

"Another word, ye beggar, and I'll choke the life oot o'

ye.

I trembled for fear his passion, once roused, should turn on me. But wee Bauldy took the floor, brandishing a bottle in either hand as he sang:

> "Up for the doodle-doodle-doo, Down for the diddle-diddle-die, Up for the doodle-doodle-doo, Down for the diddle-diddle-die."

The giant relaxed his grip under the spell of the music. Bauldy passed a bottle; Pate partook; Tam Bayne partook; the two grasped hands; "Eh, ye—" "Ye're there, ye

auld——" was again the watchword.

Then Bob sickened and vomited over the bedside. Bauldy began to doze on the bench before the out fire. A little later Tam Bayne staggered to the door and we could hear him retching in the court. All the strangers lay about the bothy the night through and only left at breakfast-time on Sunday. It was Bauldy's day for sorting the horses on his farm, but he was unconcerned. His butty would do his work that morning; Bauldy had often done as much for him.

## CHAPTER V

N the Monday the steam thresher—the "Big Mill"—was at the Home Farm, and Bob and I had been sent over to help. My work was to carry the straw, and as some of the stacks were barley I was warned to keep the barley-awns from getting down my back.

"They'll kittle the very soul oot o' ye," I was told.

I got a broad cravat from Dannie and tied it tightly round my neck. It had not been protection enough, it seemed, for during the next day or two I had an uneasy itching sensation over my body. One forenoon the same week—it was

Christmas Day-I made out the true cause.

We were dighting corn in the granary. Bob was filling, I was driving the fanners; Florrie, who liked the men's company, provided the work was not too heavy, was helping Pate to load the sacks with the corn as it came out clean. The fanners were old and clumsy, and a stronger arm than mine was needed to turn the crank without a stop. I had slackened a little. Big Pate looked at me threateningly.

"If ye stop again"—and he swore terribly—"if ye stop for hauf a second, I'll mak' ye gae doon the stair at ae step."

Terror made me strive my hardest. When the task was like to beat me, I ventured to ask,

"Will ye let's stop a minute to tak' aff my waistcoat?"

"If ye dae, by God! I'll strip yer breeks," was Pate's answer to the prayer.

Florrie laughed.

It would not have given him a thought, I knew, to carry out his threat. I toiled on and was soon sweating like a horse. Bob took pity on me.

"Here! I'll tak' a haun at the ca'in'. Man, ye're a useless

wee beggar."

Pate made no remark at the moment, but as I was letting

go the crank he leant over the fanners and caught me a thundering whack with his huge hand. I fell among the grain.

"Mind yer ain wark," Pate admonished his neighbour with a side-shake of the head; "ye've been telt that already," to which Bob answered carelessly,

"It's a' ane to me."

I was so used to Pate's blows that I did not think of whimpering. As soon as the shock was over I gathered myself up, knowing that Pate would soon have roused me with his foot. My cheek was on fire, but I suppose I must have been a comical sight as I dashed at the fanners and began turning the handle with all my strength, for Florrie laughed loudly and said,

"My certie, Pate, ye'd hae made a rare faither. It's a

pity ye've nae bairns o' yer ain!"

Bob struck in, and the three vied with each other in dirty talk while I laboured on. With every turn I felt myself getting nearer the limit of my force. Yes, I must give in, drop down, and let Pate do with me what he liked. Then the terror of him would nerve me for one effort, just one effort, more. My head spun, my hands clung to the bar and made it revolve. I knew not how. I was like a person drunk. Yet I was aware of my strange state and was frightened. Was I going to faint, to die? Everything was in a swim before my eyes. Afterwards I remembered, as in a dream, that I was gasping and moaning, and that the others were occasionally laughing at me. That did not trouble me. I was past caring. It would not have been so hopeless had I known how long the work would last; but I had not heard how many sacks were to be filled; at any rate, I had not heeded. In this state of desperation I was toiling on, my body as well as my arms throwing its weight on the crank and turning it mechanically, my mind filled with the one thought that at any moment I might drop, when dimly, vaguely, as if half-awake, I saw Bob chuck his pail into the corn. Still I made the bar revolve though the fanners were empty, and it was not till Bob punched me with his knee that I understood the toil was ended. Even when the crank was motionless I clung to it for support; left to myself I should have fallen. The knowledge that the end was near strengthened me to resume my task for a few minutes till the bushelful of spilt grain was put through, but I still held by the crank and looked on. half-senseless, while Pate tied the last sack and swung it into the row, and Bob removed the batten that had been fixed under a couple to steady the fanners. I only moved when Pate ordered me to take a besom and sweep a space he indicated near the wall. Then he and Bob zigzagged the fanners into the space I had cleared. The three went out, leaving me to sweep the floor.

"Look sharp," Pate stopped at the door to say, with a curse as usual. "We'll be takin' in neeps. See that ye're

ready by the time we're yoket."

The moment they vanished I took a step towards the corn and let myself sink on the soft bed. Never was rest so sweet. I yielded myself to its indulgence; thought even was suspended. Still, I did not sleep; at any rate I had not sleep long, for on rising I was nearly as hot as when I had been at work. Afraid that Big Pate might be waiting, I plied the besom briskly. Any clean grain that was strewn about I swept into the mass of corn, the refuse, with the chaff, went into the heap of shag against the wall, and what lay scattered near the door had to be drawn out and thrown over the stairhead for the hens. I was still hot, as I say, and bathed in sweat, and while I stood a moment considering whether to sweep some grains into the shag or the corn I had a return of the itchy creepy feeling on my back and chest. I put up my hand to rub the back of my neck. My finger touched something; I drew it out and looked at it; then I knew that the uneasiness of the past few days had not been caused by barley-awns.

My horror was indescribable. To be known as one infested with vermin! People would shun me as if I had some loath-some disease. There had been a great commotion the last autumn on its being discovered that Dennis Connolly, a harvest-hand, had left his bed polluted. Old Nicol had sworn that never another Irishman should stay on his premises. And with me they would deal yet harder; from me cleanliness was expected. Oh, how I should be disgraced with everybody I knew! Nobody would touch me, come near me; nobody, man or woman, young or old. I should be cast out to herd with tramps. And Miss Maymie—it might come to her ears, it certainly would, and she would renounce me with loathing; indeed, my own shame would drive me from her neighbourhood. Where had I got the unclean things? This I asked myself in desolation as I worked with the men

at the turnip-pits. Could it have been at the Big Mill on Monday, maybe while I stood among the women eating my piece at half-time? Hardly. Where, then? What other likely place had I been in? Ah! there it was—the low public-house I had visited last Saturday night. True, I had not been in it long, but seemingly the time had been long enough. Those dirty foreigners I had mixed with—what was I doing in such a crew? What else could I look for? Oh, why were my good resolves so late of coming? Why, instead of driving me from the foul den, had they not kept me from entering it? Oh, that I had been more true to my mistress, that I had been more worthy of her!

It was doubly hard that this calamity should fall on me now, for I had just made a great sacrifice for my mistress' sake. The last Sunday afternoon, as Dannie Martin and I

were strolling through the Satter Wood,

"Licht up," said Dannie, who had begun smoking ere we

left the bothy.

"N-no," I said; and, feeling that some explanation was necessary, I added, "Ye mind I broke my pipe last nicht."

"So ye did. I'll get ye ane. I've twa three new anes in

the bothy."

I begged him not to mind and insisted that we should go on.

"Tak' a draw o' mine, then;" and he obligingly offered his clay.

"N-no," I said once more; "I've-I'm thinkin' to gie up

the smokin'."

"Like the chewin' better?" he inquired. "I tak' a turn at them baith."

I explained, very shamefacedly, that I thought of giving

up tobacco in every form.

"Hoy-oy-oy!" yelled Dannie, and in a little he declared in settled tones "Big Pate's spilin' ye, Jamie; he's takin' a' the spunk oot o' ye; ye'll never be a man at this rate."

I brought up what Miss Maymie had told him a day or two before—that he would never be a man if he smoked so young. Dannie swore and demanded contemptuously,

"What does the like o' Miss Maymie ken aboot thae

things?"

But Miss Maymie was my conscience; she disapproved of the habit, and that was enough. It was cruel, then, that I

should be so disgraced. All that day I moved in the gloom of despair. I had no chance till late at night of finding out if I was badly infested, for after I had washed the dishes at midday we were almost ready to yoke, and in the evening Dannie came along and waited till ten. He had a great deal to say about a treat that the admiral was to give early in the year to all the farm-hands on the estate. At another time how eagerly would I have listened! Now I was too distraught to heed. The moment my chum was gone I took a stable-lantern from the bothy, lit it in the boiler-house and, entering the loose-box that Prince occupied, proceeded to strip. The vermin were on my flannel semmit, my shirt, and drawers. Hate mingled with my disgust; yes, hate. I hated the crawling things as if they had disgraced me on purpose. When I came back to the bothy, Pate was in bed. Bob was brushing his leggings for a trip into Craigkenneth with turnips the next day. Neither seemed to have a suspicion.

On the Friday evening, when I had finished my supper and

was rising to leave the kitchen, the mistress remarked,

"Ye'll be for the toon the morn's nicht?"

"Oh ay," I answered carelessly.

"And whaur d'ye pass yer time when ye're in?" she asked. Her manner was as oily as usual, and it never occurred to me that she was questioning me with a purpose. Florrie, who had been passing between the kitchen and the scullery, stopped to listen, though I gave no heed to this at the moment. I told the mistress that we spent our time mostly about the Steeple.

"Ye're never up aboot the Wynds?"

Then I knew I was discovered, at least suspected. It was a second or two ere I replied, and when I did my voice shook.

"N-no; at least, just staunin' at the end o' the street."

"Ye're never in ony o' the public-hooses there?"

"No," I said with an effort. The blood, I felt, had left my

"Ye never gang into Tibbett's public-hoose in the Friars' Wynd?"

Though aware that lying was useless now, I answered "No"

"Eh, ye leein' young scoondrel!" Florrie burst out.
"Ye was in Tibbett's nae faurer gane than Saturday last and

waited till ye were turned oot at closin'-time. Can ye deny't, ye dirty little whalp? And d'ye ken what the mistress is questionin' ye for? She cares as little as that poker whaur ye were if ye had left yer company ahint ye. But are ye aware o' the breed ye brocht hame?" She stopped, astonished, as she inspected my face, and it was some seconds ere she went on, "I declare if he doesna ken o't already! Ye lousy little blackguard! The bed's hotchin' wi' beasts till it's no fit for a pig, and you kent a' aboot it and never gied a cheep! Ye shameless wee loon! But we'll mak' ye pay for 't. The master 'll tak' yer fee this hauf-year to buy new bed-claes for the bothy."

Not till this moment had I thought about the bed. So childish, so ignorant was I! How could I miss knowing that, if the clothes I slept in were swarming, the bed could not be free? But this was not the thought that shot through my brain as Florrie made the onslaught. At once and past all doubt I knew that I had not infected the bed: the bed had infected me. Yes; Big Pate had got the swarm in the Wynds at the howff where he had spent most of the Saturday.

Assured of my innocence I held up my head.

"It wasna me," I declared stoutly; "I never brocht them hame."

"You never brocht them!" cried Florrie. "And wha brocht them, then? They're no on Bob's bed, so it maun—"

She stopped herself, and my old aunt finished the sentence for her.

"It lies atween you and Pate. And you admit that ye passed the feck o' the nicht in the very place whaur ye was likely to get sic a breed. Wad ye lay 't to Pate's charge after that?"

My courage died. To maintain, even to hint, that Pate was the guilty one would bring on me some cruelty more awful than I had yet known. It would be murder this time. Where should I turn? I stood between disgrace and death. Sinking on to a chair and hiding my face in my arms on the table I sobbed out,

"I wish I was deid. My God! I wish I was deid."

The women were silent. When I lifted my head and glanced at them shamefacedly, they were looking at each other in a curious way. Florrie spoke first.

"Weel, Jamie, if ye're vexed for 't, I daursay the mistress 'll no be ower hard on ye. But if it ever happens again, we'll hae nae pity. Ye're gaun to gie us a devilish lot o' dirty wark."

"Ay, and we canna rin the same risk again," said old Phemie. "Ye maun be put somewhere else at nicht. I'll no hae my guid bed-claes destroyed. Came awa' ower to the bothy; I think the master 'll be there."

Had Florrie not pushed me in front of her I should not have obeyed. The angry voices of the men could be heard across

the court.

"This is a bonnie mess ye've made, ye deevil's whalp," was old Nicol's shrill greeting. "What hae ye to say for yersel'? D'ye ken that ye've maist ruined me? Thae claes 'll a' hae to be smeeket; mebbe new anes bocht a'thegither. Wha's to come guid for that?"

"And wha's to come guid for my claes?" Big Pate growled.

"I ken naething and care naething about any o' yer claes," Bob broke out with more boldness than I had ever seen him show, "but there'll hae to be a change in this bothy or I'll be oot o't for ane."

"Ay, Bob," old Phemie put in soothingly, "ye're quite richt; me and Florrie was just speakin' aboot that. A dirty callan like this canna be left among dacent folk, We'll put

him in the barn-loft. He's no to mean there."

She and Florrie proceeded to help each other with suggestions for restoring cleanliness to the farm-town. I had a good shirt and new drawers and socks in my chest; these were to be put out and Florrie would bring them to the barnloft in the morning. She would also fetch a waistcoat and trousers from the house. All the things I was wearing would be washed in saltpetre ere they were used again. Big Pate was to have his clothes cleaned as well. But he had plenty of changes.

Old Nicol was continually breaking in with laments.

"I think nae farmer had ever my luck. We've barely got rid o' the breed that Irish crew left and we've anither to wipe up. It's awfu'; it's fair ruin." However, when the women had things arranged to their mind, he ended the conference by saying, "Noo, Jamie, we'll say naething about it ootside, as this is yer first offence. But mind, if it happens again, I'll expose ye, sib to me as ye are, and that'll be the end o'

ye for farm-service. Nae farmer 'll hae ocht to dae wi' a man that has beasts aboot him. But we'll say naething this

time. Isn't that sae, lads?"

"We may let it pass this time, but I'm damned if it does again," Bob declared, and the threat, I felt, was meant for his neighbour. "I dinna care hoo it happens. So ye'd better be carefu'."

Big Pate, who had hardly spoken during the colloquy, ignored the challenge. For myself, it was a relief to be saved from exposure, even though the precaution was taken for the farmer's sake, not mine. Old Nicol would have had trouble had his place got a bad name. For instance, when the Big Mill visited the Mailing, the younger mill-man slept in the bothy. If he suspected danger he might demand quarters elsewhere. To me the new arrangement was rather attractive. It would secure me, for the night at least, from Big Pate's ill-usage. It had another attraction as strong and far dearer: it gave me the chance of being alone; that meant, the chance of dreaming about Miss Maymie.

For I could think of her again without shame. I had escaped disgrace; still better, I was free from guilt. And if I had been saved in spite of myself, the warning would not be lost. For time to come I would shun low haunts, low habits; I would do nothing to deserve my queen's contempt;

I would be worthy of her yet.

The barn-loft was in the far corner of the court, facing the granary. From the Wee barn you climbed to it by a steep stair. The old horse-mill, still used occasionally, was fed from it, the mill-ring being in the stack-yard through the wall. My bed—an old mattress covered with threadbare patchwork rugs—had been made opposite the mill. My old uncle accompanied me the first night.

"Noo, ye'll blaw oot the lamp afore ye gang to yer bed," was his good-night. "It wad be a devilish thing if ye burned

doon the steadin' aboot oor lugs."

He was afraid I might waste the oil and, though I should have felt cheerier with a light, I obeyed. A light might be seen from the kitchen door.

I was tired and fell asleep at once. What hour I woke I cannot say. At first I did not know my whereabouts, with darkness all around instead of the familiar glow from the bothy fire. Soon I came to myself and felt that I was very

cold; it must have been the cold that wakened me. My feet and shoulders, especially, were ice. The loft could not miss being cold, for draughts came through the shaky roof and from the mill-ring, and on one side it was open to the Big or Straw barn, the doors of which were slack. I crouched into the smallest bulk, trying to warm one part of my body by another. That seemed to make me colder. Then I sought my resource in all trouble-Miss Maymie. I imagined myself walking through the Park in front of Lowis House. Somebody was entering it from the little gate in the ring-fence. The somebody was Miss Maymie. We met and passed, of course, without speaking, though our eyes spoke. When I reached the gate, I noticed something white on the sward: it was a fine snowy handkerchief, sweetly scented. I snatched it up and ran after her. She did not hear my foot till I was within a few yards, and even when she turned I did not speak, I waited till I was quite close. Then I touched my cap with one hand, held out the handkerchief in the other, and said in my purest English,

"I found this at the big plane-tree, Miss Maymie; I think

you must have dropped it.'

With a beaming smile she answered, "Oh, you are so kind! I wouldn't have lost that handkerchief for the world. It was a birthday present from a dear aunt who is dead. And I might never have seen it again but for you. I think you

stay at Abbot's Mailing?"

My response was slow of coming; fancy was not working well. Indeed, I had often remarked that Miss Maymie and I had our most delicious interviews when she appeared uncalled. Still more, my body had to be comfortable. If I were dead-tired or in sharp pain, she would not stay long, nor was our intercourse satisfying even when she came. Now my bodily discomfort was so keen that Miss Maymie's image wavered and soon fled. The night was frosty with a high breeze, and the cold was unbearable. I shivered and every now and then gave a wild start. It was some time ere I fairly set myself to plan some fence against the cold. My first thought was to shift the bed. That was abandoned; no other spot was more sheltered. What I needed was more or better covering. Were there any sacks about? Odd ones were sometimes left in the Wee barn just below me; it might be worth while looking. I had no matches to light the lantern

and I felt it eerie in the dark and loneliness; necessity made me stir. I rose and groped round the wall till I reached the railing, then kept it to the stair-head and descended. First I made for the chopper on which sacks were often left. None were there to-night, so I felt my way to the far end, and on the partition separating the two barns I found a lot of sacks hanging on nails. Better too many than too few, was my thought, and I secured a big armful. By this time I was nearly helpless with cold, having nothing on but my shirt, and I recklessly hurried through the darkness to where I supposed the stair must be. First I was brought up by a tremendous smash on the shoulder from what I afterwards found to be the end of the chopper. On recovering myself a little I moved on, though more cautiously, but soon touched something with my foot and brought the top of it on my head. Then it fell with a great crash, the noise frightening me more than the blow, which had not been severe. A little time was again needed to get over the shock. On stooping I found that the object was a hay-fork. Without further misadventure I reached the bed, and in frantic haste-for I was perishing—I spread the sacks as well as the darkness allowed and got into bed once more. My teeth still chattered, my limbs would start, but by degrees I gathered some heat, then I felt comfortable, then forgot everything.

After a time I woke again. It was still dark, utterly dark; I knew that, though my eyes were shut. The cold was not troubling me now; I was in no bodily discomfort. Something else was giving me thought, something very different. There was dead stillness; not a rat or a mouse moved; yet, as I lay with shut eyes, I had the feeling that I had not wakened of myself. I had heard something, had become aware of something, that broke my sleep. Something, somebody, was in the loft, was close to me, at my side. I durst not stir; the least movement and He would act, would clutch me by the throat, would choke me dead. I even checked my breathing till it was so soft as to be inaudible; any sign of life would be excuse for Him to assail me. What "He" was I could not tell—Something supernatural, yet with the merciless heart of a man. So spellbound was I with fear that I durst not open my eyes, though well aware that all was dark around; if I did, I should behold Something monstrous, Something overwhelming, Something more awful than the vague fantasy I

now had, Something that would end all. I stopped breathing altogether that I might hear Him and know his exact whereabouts. Nothing, nothing! Utter stillness; but it was a stillness charged with a presence. Not only was He there: He knew my every movement, my every thought, knew that I was listening for Him, was playing the spy. This would anger Him, would precipitate His attack; my only chance was to bide still, to bide in undisguised fear; that might appease Him. So I let myself breathe again, though softly as before. Soon the feeling possessed me that He had an axe raised over my head, and that at any moment, on some movement of mine or merely from His own whim, He would bring it rushing down and cleave my skull. So vivid was this feeling that involuntarily my eyelids pressed tight together as they might before a threatened blow. With all this acuteness of terror the thought would come, Is not this sheer fancy? How can anybody be near? Once, when this question arose, I ventured, with a shrinking like the shrinking from death, to open my eyes. As I had known already, the deepest darkness closed me in; yet the darkness was no protection; He could see, though I was helpless as the blind. Once my eyes were open, I durst not shut them again. There I lay on my back silent, motionless, looking upward and at times venturing a stealthy glance aside, knowing the while that such freedom might enrage Him and bring down the fatal stroke. How it ended I never knew. My panic did not cease; most likely the agony of suspense overpowered my senses and I slept from sheer exhaustion.

On waking for the third time I was in no uncertainty as to another's presence. A firm hand had me by the shoulder and was shaking me so roughly that I jumped on end.

"D'ye mean to lie a' day? Ye're desperate fond o' yer

new bed."

Florrie was the speaker, and as the loft was lit, though feebly, by her lantern, I could see her well enough the instant I opened my eyes. Yet the night's terrors were so near me still that they returned at the shock of the rude awakening. Florrie, divining nothing of my state, went on without sympathy:

"Dinna hae us waitin' anither minute or it's a stick ye'll get to yer back. There's yer new claes. And when ye come oot, fling yer auld anes in the bine at the kitchen door. Tak'

my lamp," she added, when I told her I had no matches, and she laid her lantern at the stair-head to let her see her way down.

There was no time to examine my new raiment. As she helped me to fill the milk-cans, she laughed and declared I was a dandy, but I gave my dress no attention till after I returned from Craigkenneth. By the time I had got breakfast and mucked the byre, it was daylight, and the odd horse, old Roy, had to be yoked. The men, each with his pair, were bound for Bankier siding to lift a truck of coals, and I was to accompany them with one cart. Two Irishwomen had come to dress potatoes, and they passed us in the court as old Nicol was giving us our orders.

"Save us, and that's niver little Jamie," cried hook-nosed Biddy, surveying my costume. "Sure, you've been to Noah's ark for that fancy-suit. I'd give you a new shilling for luck, only I've nothing less than a foive-pound note in my pocket

at prisent."

"Sure, them's iligant breeches," said her neighbour; "and, if I hadn't a large family of me own, I'd adopt you on the spot. That's instid of the new shilling." And she gave

my leg a shrewd nip.

The clothes had been old Nicol's, and even he had cast them off as done. Florrie and the mistress had adapted the trousers to my figure by simply cutting a part off the legs and had turned the old coat into a jacket by depriving it of the tails. The waistcoat, which had not been tampered with, reached midway to my knees. The men encouraged the two crones in their ridicule, Nicol himself sharing in the joke. He had lent me his kirk-suit, he explained, my own having met with an accident.

"It bates me how you had the heart to part with them," Biddy declared. "There's a loife-time's wear in them yet and they're the very hoight of fashion;" and the banter would have lasted till the carts started had not Florrie appeared at the mouth of the shed and made a diversion.

"Yon's surely the Wanderer," she said, following with her eye a figure that was trailing itself up the Lang Stracht.

All came out to look, some of them shading their eyes with

their hands though there was no sun.

"Yis, sure, it's the Wanderer's own silf," Biddy corroborated; and Bob remarked,

"I was wonderin' what had come ower her; I havena seen her for months."

The others took up the new topic and I was spared further ridicule.

I was not interested in the Wanderer, though, like other farm-hands of the shire, I knew her history. She belonged to the district, had been well educated, and meant for some genteel calling. However, she chose farm-service, and was soon known to all the ploughmen in the countryside. Not only did she bring them about the farms where she served, she went as freely among them, spending many a night in their bothies. In a few years she was so notorious that no farmer would keep her; besides, she had lost the way of constant work. She supported herself a while by odd labour, taking a week at harvesting, potato-lifting and the like, and lodging in the hamlets round Craigkenneth, or in the Wynds of Craigkenneth itself if no bothy was available. In time she got utterly broken-down, dropped even the pretence of work, and sank to a common tramp.

"The dirty drab!" said Florrie viciously in the midst of the talk. "Nae wonder her ain faither wadna look at her. He was in a guid position, I suppose. Wasn't he heid-forester

at Shirgarvie?"

"He was a damned sleekit auld hypocrite, if ye ask me," Bob declared with an energy unusual for him.

"But her mither never looked at her either," rejoined

Florrie quickly.

"That was her step-mither; her ain mither dee'd when she was a lassie. That's no yesterday either, for the Wanderer'll be—let's see—she'll be—"

"Never heed what she'll be, Bob," the old farmer broke in; "you just slip awa' noo that ye're yoket and never fash yer heid aboot the Wanderer. We got enough o' her when she

served at the Mailing."

The group had no chance of renewing their merriment at my expense. Yet their ridicule left me miserable. I had lately been more careful about my appearance, and here was I turned into a scarecrow that a ragged wretch like old Biddy had a right to laugh at. The whole way to Bankier Lye I kept in the cart, though the two men got down at intervals to restore themselves to heat. But returning with the full carts we had to walk, and I fancied that everybody we met in decent

dress was amused at the figure I made. It was a relief to encounter an occasional tramp; he could not banter me, could not eye me contemptuously; his costume would be almost as weathered and ill-fitting as my own. Above all, I dreaded to meet Miss Maymie. How could I look free and man-like in old Nicol's cast-off habiliments? I scanned the road every minute, ready to slink under cover of Roy should the fair rider appear.

## CHAPTER VI

HE shame I felt at my scarecrow appearance could not keep another trouble from agitating me that day. How was I to get through a second night in the loft? I was quite aware my terrors had been imaginary; the daylight had banished them. Yet they would return with the dark and to bear them another night was beyond me. The horses or cattle would be company. But the stable was locked after eight o'clock and the key hung in the bothy. The byre was not locked and it was always warm with the cows' breath; only, there was the risk of discovery; I might sleep in and be found there in the morning.

Ere night came I had found a plan. I must still sleep in the barn-loft, but might I not have company there? Our old collie was never chained; he was very fond of me and would not need much enticement to share my quarters; indeed, the loft would be more comfortable than the old barrel in the court that served for his kennel. I hung about the kitchen door till pretty late, and when the kitchen was empty for a minute I darted in, made for the press, and grabbed two new-baked scones. Ranger needed no coaxing; he was soon in bed with me, and he both kept me warm and banished all eerieness. That night my waking dreams flowed free; Miss Maymie was with me long. The barn-loft, a short while before so dreaded, was like to be a glad haven in my sea of trouble.

But that same week—it was the last day of the year but one—I learned my mistake. A Craigkenneth dealer, who had bought one of Nicol's potato-pits, was out opening it and the farmer's hands were helping. The pit had first to be stripped. The outmost covering was of old potato-shaws, a fence against frost. These I was to clear away, and I soon bared as much of the pit as we were likely to lift that day. Below was a

blanket of earth at least half a foot thick. Big Pate cut this away with a spade and, as the keen frost of the last week had gone through the shaws, the crusted coat came off in slabs a yard long. The earth inside was not affected; it was quite soft and powdery. Under this, again, was a layer of straw which had to be rolled back carefully or loose earth might drop among the potatoes and make extra work. Now the lifting began. Walls, the dealer, used a harp, that is, a shovel with a blade of steel spars to let the earth through. He pressed it in gently, taking care neither to keep it too close to the ground and so lift the earth, nor yet to hold it high and slice the potatoes. On either side stood a woman with a riddle, into which the harpful was emptied. She gave the riddle a shake to let the small potatoes through; the remainder she dressed, flinging the rotten ones down behind her, the diseased ones into a scull set between her and her neighbour, and the sound ones into another scull at her side. My task was to empty the sculls. The sound potatoes went into sacks, the diseased into a cart that stood near by unvoked. When a sack looked about full, Big Pate lifted it on to the weighs, and as soon as it reached the standard, a hundredweight and a half, he tied it and set it a-row with the rest. Commonly. two men take the full sack if it has to be carried any distance. Pate would have no help. Locking his arms round the sack he lifted it, holding it close against his front, and so carried it off. If he did not spare himself, he had still less feeling for me. The two women were expert dressers and I could do no more than keep up with them; so when Bauldy Aitken, who had come down from the hill-country for a load, took a third riddle, I was fairly beaten. Every now and then the sculls were running over and the work had to stop. It was some time ere Big Pate noticed this; when he did, he gave me a cuff that knocked me over.

Little Bauldy had not understood that he was the cause of the trouble. He offered now to help me, and when Pate told him to mind his own work he laughingly declared that Pate was not his gaffer.

"No, but I'm his," was Pate's answer, and his look and tone

taught me that I had better struggle on unaided.

The women told him frankly enough what they thought of his ill-usage; it was a "damned shame." The dealer said nothing; he would be frightened, maybe, that Pate might put in a word against him with old Nicol and keep him from

getting the rest of the pits at the same figure.

Wee Bauldy could not bear to see my desperate struggles. He told his companions in an undertone that he would knock off and the three of them might then slow down till I caught up on them.

"Whaur are ye bound for?" Pate demanded, seeing him turn away, and Bauldy gave as excuse that he had to see old Nick about two queys which his master wanted to sell.

Though Walls and the two women took Bauldy's hint, my task was still as painful. The unyoked cart was getting full of diseased potatoes. To empty the sculls had been easy at first; I had only to tip them over the cart-edge. Now I had to fling the potatoes well into the body of the cart for fear they should run over. A scull, remember, held four stone, and was a fair weight of itself. As I toiled on I began to feel a dull pain low down on my right side; soon it grew acute and. in the moments of severest strain, almost unbearable. Every time I had to turn to the cart my heart sank. How should I manage this one scull more? Should I manage it at all? Here is how I may best describe the pain in my side: when I was making an extra effort I felt as if something inside me might give way. All the while, too, I tried to hide the weakness from my fellow-workers; I dreaded to get the name of being lazy or even useless. Oh, the agony! And what relief when Walls pronounced the first cart to be full enough and, Big Pate not contradicting, told me to start the second.

The pain in my side did not ease during working-hours or even when we knocked off at darkening. It alarmed me. If this lasted I should be unfit for work, and what would become of me then? Nicol would not keep me about his town, kin to him as I was; and if he turned me out, what stranger would take me in? I should be left to die at the roadside. Maybe I was doomed already; the pain was unlike anything I had ever known; I began to fear it was past cure. Even if it were not, what could be done? Who was to do anything? The very women would not bother with me. Had the sore been visible, had my side been torn, had bones been broken, they might have tried some remedy or called in a doctor; but I could tell them only of pain and they would think the hurt a trifle, perhaps an excuse for idleness. If anything was to be done for my ease it must be by myself. As I sat at

supper, unable, for once, to clear my dish, thought was working. What was there about the farm likely to relieve the pain? Anything to be prepared? Anything to be stolen? Oil? Plenty of that; but was not that too weak a thing? I had it! There was the cure at my hand. Porridge for a poultice! Old Phemie gave me a big plate of oatmeal porridge morning and night; it was the only dish she did not stint; and this evening I had hardly touched the plate and was about to set it down for Ranger. I tumbled the mess into my red handkerchief and stuffed it in my pocket. It was nearly three hours later ere I got up to the barn-loft, and of course the porridge was cold as clay. For this, too, I was ready. After the first night in my new quarters I had procured a stable-lantern to let me see when going to bed and rising; once even, when Ranger had deserted me, I had let it burn the whole night, merely stuffing the slit in the wall to keep it from shining into the court. Taking the same precaution, I lit it now and held the porridge over it in my handkerchief. When the porridge was well heated, I clapped it on the sore. The warmth was grateful; I knew no other benefit. Later, I heated the mess a second, and, after an interval, a third time. The pain had sensibly lessened, had grown bearable indeed, and as I was too tired for more doctoring, I blew out the lantern and, bestowing a moment on Miss Maymie, was soon asleep.

I woke disturbed. Ranger, huddled beside me under the clothes, was growling, and soon he kept his head lifted, listening to some sound from the stackyard. Tramps would be about Old Nicol did his utmost to discourage them, but he could not banish them altogether. I hushed the dog, for I wanted to sleep. Soon he let out a sharp yelp, and to my wonder a voice from the stackyard responded in the purest accent,

"Ranger, Ranger, don't you know me?"

Instantly the dog was silent, and when the speaker added, "Is that how you treat your friends?" he gave a grunt or

two of pleased recognition.

The voice did not belong to anybody at the Mailing. Had the language and accent been those of a tramp I should not have been surprised that he knew the dog's name; a person in the habit of taking the farm on his round might easily know that. More surprising was it that the dog should recognise the voice. Still, Ranger was a wise old fellow and

such acuteness was not beyond him. Yet my astonishment was unspeakable; I was bewildered. The voice—the voice it was that thrilled me. That voice! Was I dreaming? Was I still dreaming, still asleep? I felt lost. After waiting a little, seated in bed and assuring myself that I was really awake, I got out, drew on my trousers, and groped towards the bole that opened on to the stackyard. The bole was in a corner of the loft and was used for pitching the sheaves through when our own mill was threshing. It was just a window, except that it was closed with wood instead of a glass sash. As I opened it I caught the sound of someone moving beneath. Ranger was beside me and perfectly quiet. Stealthily, my fingers scarcely able to work for excitement, I opened the shutter; but the night was black; I could see nothing. The person had not heard me, at least had not heeded me; the movements were now further off, in the mill-ring. I coughed: no response. I coughed louder, dreading to alarm the young dog in the court and rouse the farmer's folk, dreading yet more to miss the wondrous chance. The steps, evidently feeling their way and sometimes stumbling, were making towards me, and I coughed once more to guide them.

"Have you got lost?" I asked in a loud whisper, involuntarily speaking in the pure accent of the one I addressed.

Silence a short while. Then the answer,

"Yes, I'm lost, quite lost."

The voice again! I could not mistake it. So light, so birdlike, with the chuckle in it even now, only subdued by trouble. Emotion made my own voice falter. Yet love taught there must be no delay, and I asked, speaking as correctly as I could,

"You'll stop with me for the night?"
"Of course," the dear voice answered. "Isn't that what

I'm here for?"

Of course. And I, fool-like, was wasting time in talk when my queen, by some strange chance-some awful cruelty to her but wondrous fortune to me-stood below in the cold and the dark, outcast from her grand house, her rich parents. Not an instant to waste: she must be sheltered, tended, at once. But how to get her into shelter? I durst not go down into the court and bring her round; to alarm the inmates of the house or the bothy must not be risked. She must enter by the bole, and that was only possible with a ladder.

"Could you-?" I began, but stopped myself. I was going

to ask if she could find the ladder in the mill-ring and set it up. Such a question! How could Miss Maymie handle a ladder? There was no rope to let me down; I must drop it, though I broke my legs. As I was kneeling to clutch the stone sill another means suggested itself—the mill. I groped along to it, squeezed through the opening in the wall, and striding one of the beams that connected the machinery with the horsegear, slid down into the middle of the mill-ring. The ladder, I knew, lay near the water-cart; I soon found it, though a frosty fog obscured everything, and with the ladder on my shoulder I joined Miss Maymie below the loft-bole. At the very first trial I felt the top of the ladder fall into the opening. No time to talk; that would come when she was safe and in comfort.

"I'll steady it till you get up," I directed her. "Keep your head bent when you get in, for the bole's not very high."

"I know, I know," she assured me quickly.

"And when you get on to the floor, don't stir till I come up, for you might hurt yourself in the dark. Let me start you," I added, knowing she was ready to mount, and as I put out my hand to touch her, to touch her for the first time in my life, to touch her as I had dreamed a thousand and a thousand times, I shook like one in palsy. But the moment I touched her the feeling passed, though that which succeeded was intenser The lover's emotion changed to melting pity. For what had her cruel parents done? Not cast her out only, but cast her out in ragged, filthy clothes. My hand, resting on her waist, told me that; I felt the tattered edge of a shawl and the coarse waistband of a petticoat. Oh, what marvel of cruelty had been here! What had changed her parents' mood—those parents who had always seemed so proud of her? What had made them drive her out and with all the marks of shame? Oh, why had they done this to my own Miss Maymie? Oh, how they had used my darling!

Yet love like mine knows no remissness. Though wonder and indignant pity were strong, I did not slacken my activity to indulge them. All yielded to the one master-emotion—desire to serve her, desire to do her good. With scarcely a moment's loss I went on with my preparations for her safety.

"You'll tell me when you get to the top," I said, though tears choked my voice; "and—and you'll just whisper in case folk should hear."

"I'll let you know;" and it was not long till the call came softly from above, "I'm all right. I'm waiting for you."

Waiting for me! Never in my most delicious dreams had I listened to those words. I seemed to leave the ground on wings, and an instant was enough to move the top of the ladder aside and shut the bole. An instant! Yet in the time thoughts had flooded my brain. She was here, beside me, to be sheltered, cherished. I should hear the strange story, learn what evil power had changed her parents' fondness to venomous hate. I should hear, too, how she had learned my whereabouts. And once this was told we should put the sorrow by for ever and begin a new sweet tale, repeating with living voice all the dear longings we had so often told each other in dreams. With trembling fingers I drew out my matchbox and made ready to light the lantern. At last! The darkness was to part and in the light I should look into her eyes. Should I have strength to meet them? Yes; for they would be charged with trustful love. Yet, for all my fancied courage, it was not till the wick burned high that I ventured to look up. Then-then I had a shock such as I had never known and such as life can hardly have in store. I had looked up to behold the pure sunny face of my beloved, and what-terrors of darkness !- what did I see? The watery eves, the blotched swollen cheeks of a wretch ravaged with debauchery and disease. The lamp fell to the floor though it still burned, and the horror that made me shrink must have been starting from my eyes, for the woman demanded,

"What the hell's wrang wi' ye? And wha the hell are you,

onyway?"

The change of speech, following the awful contrast between her fancied looks and the reality, raised my bewilderment to such a pitch that sense nearly left me. Had some fiendish power touched Miss Maymie since I left her at the ladder-foot, turning her from a fair sweet maiden into this vile hag? Yet strange! The voice was still hers, even when sharpened by impatience and uttering rough oaths in the broadest accent. Thought could do nothing with the mystery. I stood and stared on.

"Pick up the lamp," said the woman, "instead o' glowerin' there like a wild-cat. Is that yer bed?" and she threw herself on it as if exhausted. "My God! that's fine. But

wha are you?" she asked once more.

"I'm—I'm the laddie," I managed to answer.

"You're the laddie," she repeated contemptuously. "Ye havena been here long?"

" Just since the May Term."

"Damned if I didna tak' ye for some young swell when I heard ye speak first. They used to hae a rich body's son here that paid for learnin' farmin'. Ye didna speak like a farmladdie."

The talk had composed me. This was a flesh-and-blood being after all. Something mysterious there was about her still, but nothing supernatural. My voice was steadier as I answered,

"Mebbe no. I thocht it was---"

But I stopped in confusion. I had nearly given away my secret.

"Wha did you think I was?" she demanded. "Ye've had hizzies here afore. Ye're young to be at that game; young for a laddie, onyway."

Something moved me to protest.

"There's never been a lassie here except-"

"Ay, except—" she sneered, as I interrupted myself once more.

"Except Florrie," I went on; "and she just cam' to wauken me."

"Ay; ye're ower tender a chicken for her to pick. Pate Mackinlay'll be mair to her taste. Is 't true that she's cairryin' on wi' him?" Reading the answer in my eyes she continued, "Weel, she's welcome to him. My curse on them baith."

Then she seemed to have an absent fit. She was thoughtful, at least silent. In a little she began stroking the dog that had

lain down near her.

"So ye kent me again, auld man? You're the only lad that hasna forgotten me."

Here curiosity, which had grown strong, prompted me to

say,

"I didna ken ye either, at first."

"No? Weel, it's gey dark ootside."

"But I dinna ken ye yet."

"Ye what! I thocht a'body atween Perth and Peebles kent me."

"I never saw ye in my life," I assured her."
"Did ye never hear tell o' the Wanderer?"

"Ay," was all I could answer.

"I thocht sae," and she gave a hard laugh. "Weel, that's A'body's heard o' me and damned little guid." She seemed about to say something more but checked herself as if it were not worth while, and fetching a deep sigh she resumed fondling the dog that was pressing his muzzle into her lap. "Ay, ay. So Ranger never forgets Auld Lang Syne. And ye needna, my man; for I was gey guid to ye."
"Ye used to serve here, didn't ye?" I asked.

"I did that, but me and auld Phemie were aye quarrellin' and I ran awa' She keepet my fee and wanted to keep my kist as weel. So it's but fair she should gie me free lodgings at orra times." She had been yawning occasionally, and the turn of the talk may have recalled her weariness, for she stretched herself on the bed as if preparing for sleep. But her eye catching the handkerchief that lay on the sacks,

"What's this?" she asked. "Parritch? My God! the

very thing I was wantin'."

"Dinna," I cried. "I had them on."

"Had ye?" she asked composedly, but only after she had gulped a greedy mouthful. Nor did she speak a word more till she had licked the last morsel from the handkerchief. "That's better," she then remarked with a deep breath of comfort. "Ye see, my laddie," she continued, reading disgust in my face, "we canna be particular when we're perishin'. What was the parritch for? Are ye no weel?"

"I've a sair side."

"And I've eaten yer poultice," and she gave a laugh. "That's hard on ye, but I never thocht o't at the minute."

I explained that I was done with the poultice; my side was

a little better.

"Mustard's a faur stronger thing," the Wanderer remarked, speaking carelessly and yawning again. "I'll lie doon," she went on. "But this 'll be your bed. I maunna tak' it frae ye like the parritch. Gie us thae sacks and I'll lie doon there;" and she indicated a space further along. "I'm as tired as a draigled bitch." Without waiting for leave she threw the sacks on the floor and lay down above them with no covering. Her clothes were a brown shawl and a grey striped petticoat, both very ragged. She had on a pair of elastic-sided boots, gone both in sole and upper. As covering for her head she had only her hair which, soiled and straggling, was still golden.

For several reasons I was unwilling to let her stay in the loft.

"Hoo will ye manage in the mornin'?" I asked, seeing she would soon be asleep. "If they catch ye here, they'll be wild."

"They canna dae muckle to me; they can hardly mak' me

waur than I am."

"No; but I'll catch it."

"Maybe," was her careless answer. The next moment, however, she asked, "When d'ye get up in the morning?"

"Five o'clock. Florrie waukens me. She opens the barndoor doon below, and if I hear her she'll no come up and it'll be a' richt. But if I dinna, she'll come up and she'll catch ve, for she ave carries a licht."

"Oh, we'll hear her, either you or me."
"But hoo will ye get awa'? The best time wad be just when I rise, for the men dinna get up for anither hauf-oor. I'll open the bole and draw the ladder ower and ye'll get doon weel enough."

"Oh, ay, we'll manage," she said in a drowsy voice, and

soon her heavy breathing told me she was asleep.

I looked at her once or twice as I arranged my bed-clothes and made ready to lie down. All the folk I had heard talk of her had said she had once been pretty, and it may have been their judgment that made me fancy there were remnants of beauty in the face. Her features had certainly been good; the mouth was small, the nose shapely, and now that her bleared eyes were shut they did not disgust me with their hideous coarseness. Or maybe I viewed her somewhat favourably for having confounded her with my queen. Both had one voice, and whoever shared in anything with Miss Maymie had a certain interest for me. However, I was too tired and indeed too indifferent to watch her long. And when I lay down I found something else to give me concern; the pain in my side, that had slept or had been forgotten, woke once more. In spite of my weariness I only drowsed by snatches, and I was awake when Florrie opened the barn-door. I shook up the Wanderer and told her she must go. She yawned and promised to leave in time enough: she knew the place, she would take care not to be seen. But I was inflexible, and she had to make for the bole.

"Ye'll no bolt it?" she asked rather anxiously, as she

turned to descend the ladder. "I'll mebbe need to come back sune."

I hesitated. It was hard to refuse such a small kindness, yet I feared discovery. Ere I had an answer ready, she said in the pure speech and coaxing tone she had used at the first to Ranger,

"Come now, you'll surely do that for me, my bonnie boy." Doubtless that tone had cajoled many a lover. On me, too, it had power, though for a reason the woman could not know. The likeness to Miss Maymie's speech and voice was again startling. Offered in such accents any petition, however hard, must have reached my heart.

"Yes, I'll leave it open. But quick, quick!"

## CHAPTER VII

ALLS was again out at the potato-pits and Big Pate and I were helping. The pain in my side was worse than ever. One thought alone kept me up-to-morrow was New Year and a holiday. At supper I recalled the Wanderer's hint, and stole some dry mustard from the press as well as a piece of fresh butter from the table. It was late ere I was free to use them. The men were making ready for to-morrow. Pate would be spending the day in Craigkenneth, and Bob was going to his parents' at Aletown. Both had to shave and I had a part to take in the performance. The bothy looking-glass had been smashed long ago and only a fragment, an inch and a half square, survived. As this could not be hung up and could not well be set on the table or mantelpiece, Big Pate made me stand in front of him on shaving-nights and hold the glass. Bob made me do the same. I had to tidy up, of course, when the shaving was over. This evening, instead of replacing the jug on the shelf, I left some boiling water in it and carried it off unobserved. The Wanderer was already in the barn-loft, lying on the sacks. She had been mouching about Lucas and had made nearly two shillings. People gave more freely at New Year time, I suppose; Mr. Ralston of Cambuslochan, for instance, had given a sixpence. The Wanderer's breath told me how some of the coin had been melted.

"Ye've been drinkin'," I remarked as I smoothed a rag on

the floor to hold the mustard.

"I had twa haufs at Lucas in the forenoon and twa glass at nicht," she confessed coolly.

"But ye're no drunk."

"I couldna get drunk noo if I tried. What's this?" and

she clutched the jug.

I explained what it was for, and her disappointment made her lose interest in my movements. "Hoo d'ye mak' a blister?" I asked at last, for I was in doubt whether to spread the mustard on the cloth and run water on it or moisten it in the water first.

"Let me dae 't. Men folk have nae hauns. Have ye no a spoon?" And she knelt on the floor where the ragful of

mustard was spread.

"No. I've a knife, though, if that'll dae."

"Haud yer hauns, then," and when I held them close, palm upwards, she shook the mustard into them, and slaked it with a little water. Then she used the knife-blade to transfer the mustard to the cloth after softening the rag with some of the fresh butter. "Noo strip and lie doon; I'll be yer nurse. Ye never had a woman to nurse ye, I'll gae bail," she went on in a lively strain, for whatever she might say the whisky had touched her head. "Eh, ye dinna ken ye're born yet, ye puir bit wastrel. Noo, just lay yer haun on the sair bit. There; that'll seek the sair or my name's no—no the Wanderer."

The heat was pleasant at first, and, thankful for her offices, I asked.

"What's yer first name?"

"They used to ca' me Mary," she answered and sighed. I had no need to ask her surname, for I knew that the late

head forester at Shirgarvie was called Morrison.

"That's a bonnie name—Mary; it's the bonniest name of a'—maistly." But the mustard began to make itself felt and gave my thoughts a new turn. "It's gey hot. Will 't sune be time to tak' it off?"

She laughed. "It's a guid sign when it's nippin'. Let it

bite awa', only dinna fa' asleep wi't on."

I bore the fiery pain with all my resolution, though at times I had to hold the cloth off my body. Only when the Wanderer gave me leave, did I remove it altogether. I rubbed the place with what butter was left, but there was no sleep for me that night, and Florrie did not need to call me twice.

The Wanderer looked my side as I was putting on my clothes. The skin was whole, though glowing-red, and the old pain seemed gone. Perhaps, however, it was only mastered for the time by the fiery torture that had super-

vened. It was too soon to tell.

"Get some floor and strinkle 't on 't," my nurse advised. "That'll tak' oot the heat. And noo ye maun wish me a

Guid New Year, Jamie," she went on in the lively manner of the night before.

I grew suspicious; I knew the class to which the Wanderer

and myself belonged.

"Have ye a bottle wi' ye?" I demanded.

She merely laughed for answer. In a little she said,

"So the drink's provided and there's only the meat to fend for. And you'll have to look after that."

"Ye're no gaun to stop here a' day?" I asked.

"Ye widna "Deed am I," she said with another laugh.

turn me oot after me nursin' ye last nicht?"

I had not wanted company in the loft that day. After I returned with the milk-cart and had breakfasted I should only have to muck the byre. Then I might go where I chose. meant to spend the day in the loft resting myself and dreaming about Miss Maymie. And my dreams would flow more free were I alone.

But in our talk the night before I had mentioned that the farm-hands would all be away for the day. So there was no fear of discovery, the Wanderer reminded me.

"But hoo can I get ye ony meat?" I asked, offering the

worst difficulty I could think of.
"Fine that," she assured me. "Auld Phemie has an open haun on New Year's Day and ye maun watch your chance."

At Abbot's Mailing, as on many farms, it was the New Year custom for all the hands to breakfast together in the kitchen ere leaving to enjoy themselves for the day. I had often heard that old Phemie kept all her hospitality for that one morning, and I found it true. There was a great ashetful of ham and eggs, an enormous steak-pie, and, when the eating was over, the whisky-bottle went round. I stuffed my pockets on the sly, and as soon as I thought it safe I made for the loft, resolved not to leave it that day. Though the light was not good even at noon, it let me see the Wanderer's features more distinctly than I had ever done by lantern-light—an unlucky thing for us both, for the debauched face was always dispelling the illusion created by the sweet voice. I tried not to look at her.

"Ye've an awfu' nice voice," I remarked to her once as

we lay talking, she having the sacks, I the rugs.

"It's the only thing about me that's no fair ruined," she answered.

"I've heard a voice like it," I ventured to say.

"Whaur?"

"I'm-I'm no sure," I said, for I might play with my secret but would never let it out; "I couldna say. But it minds me o' somebody that speaks like you."

"Ay, but can they sing like me?" and she sat up and

cleared her throat as if to start.

"Dinna, dinna," I begged; "they'll hear ye."

Without heeding me she started, though she had the prudence to keep her voice low:

> " O Mary, at thy window be, It is the wish'd, the trysted hour; Those smiles and glances let me see That mak' the miser's treasure poor.

" How blithely wad I bide the stoure, A weary slave frae sun to sun, Could I the rich reward secure. The lovely Mary Morison."

"Naebody ever made a sang aboot you, Jamie," she said

jestingly, and she waited a little to get my praise.
"It's fine, Mary; it's first-rate," I assured her, though I was hardly sincere. Her voice was not so pure when she sang. She must have been satisfied, however, for rising to her feet she sang on:

> "Yestreen, when to the trembling string The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha', To thee my fancy took its wing, I sat, but neither heard nor saw. Tho' this was fair, and that was braw, And you the toast o' a' the town, I sighed and said among them a',

> > 'Ye are na Mary Morison.'"

She was so excited by now that she neither waited for my applause nor gave a thought to caution. Letting her voice go she ended the song:

> "O Mary, canst thou wreck his peace Wha for thy sake would gladly dee? Or canst thou break that heart of his Whase only fault is loving thee? If love for love thou wilt not gie At least be pity to me shown; A thought ungentle canna be The thought o' Mary Morison."

As she ended, the Wanderer sank on the bed and looked to me with a triumphant air. I again managed to say it was "fine, grand," and did not hint that the lurking roughness in her voice had come out the more as she strained it. The

Wanderer was quite pleased with herself and with me.

"Mony's the ane has played that sang in my honour, Jamie," she informed me, and her voice was full of self-complacency. "Mony and mony a time they've gien me 't on the concertina. Ay, and I've heard it on mair than the concertina. I didna aye stick to ploughmen, ye maun ken; I've passed through higher hauns. What wad ye say to my being a captain's leddy?" As I did not reply, she went on, "Ay, and nae faurer awa' than Craigkenneth. The captain—never heed the name; we'll just ca' him the captain—has picked me aff the street afore noo and driven me wi' him in a cab. Ay, and mony's the nicht I've spent wi' him in the castle."

"Hoo did ye get in?" I asked, not that I was curious but I saw that my companion wanted to talk and expected me to

show some interest. "Did the sentry no stop ye?"

"The sentry durstna cheep. But we had plenty o' tricks, onyway. I've gane in as a flesher's laddie wi' a basket on my heid, and I've gane in as a post-office laddie wi' a telegram, and I've gane in as a leddy-visitor wantin' to see through the castle, and I've stayed in the captain's quarters for days on end. The roughest passage ever I had was ae nicht or rather ae mornin' when the young blades were frichtet, or pretended they were frichtet, for the sentry tellin' the colonel. Ye'll never guess what they did. They got a long rope and a basket—it was a bonnie simmer mornin' I mind—and they let me ower the wa' and doon the rocks. Ye've heard o' the man that was let doon—but ye'll never gang to a kirk?"

"No; but I ken wha ye mean. I've read it at the schule."

"Weel, I escaped like him. Such lauchin' the young scamps had! I was a bit eerie, though. So ye see, Jamie, my man, I've keepet guid company in my day."

I might have heard of other escapades had I been curious.

One question I did put, though not till later.

"Mary," I asked, as we were talking in the evening when the liquor was no longer in her head, "was 't the captain that learned ye to speak proper?"

"I'm no speakin' proper," she said in some surprise.

"No; but ye whiles dae 't. Was 't the captain that learned

ye ? "

"He would help, I daresay," she answered, changing her speech involuntarily; "though I could speak well enough before I saw him. I was at the school till I was near sixteen. I was a pupil-teacher."

"Oh ay, I forgot."

"What did ye forget?" she demanded.

"I've heard folk speak aboot ye and say ye were comin' oot

for a teacher."

"So I was, and that's hoo I can be a guid speaker when I like. But nae doot the captain put the heid-sheaf on my education. He was gey fond o' me, and I daursay I micht ha' been wi' him yet. But I never cared for gentry or gentry's ways. Gie me a ploughman. Even when I was a pupil-teacher—"

But I brought her back to what interested myself.

"I like to hear you speak proper."

"What do you know about 'speaking proper'?"

"You said yourself that I spoke like a swell," I reminded her. "I was the best scholar at Tiptoy school, and the teacher was wild when Nicol made me leave and come to the Mailing. And I write a' Nicol's business letters for him."

"What right had auld Nick to make you leave?" she asked

in some surprise.

" He's my uncle."
"Your uncle!"

"Yes. At least in a kind of way. He was my mother's

uncle."

"Your mother's uncle!" and her interest and astonishment had increased. "You don't mean to say your mother was Mary Gow?"

"Yes; her name was Mary. My father's name was

Bryce."

"Jamie Bryce. Your mother ran off with him. He was just a ploughman."

"So I've been told. But he died before I can mind of him,

and my mother has been dead a long time too."

"I know; I've seen them both, though I never knew them to speak to. Your mother had to gang to service efter her man dee'd, had she no?"

"Ay; and I was brocht up with frien's o' my faither's at

Tiptoy. But they were glad enough when Nicol wanted me,

for they were puir and couldna keep themsel's."

"Then you and Pate Mackinlay 'll be connecket tae," said the Wanderer, as if a new thought had come into her head. "Let's see. He's a nephew o' auld Nick's, so he would be yer mither's cousin."

" Ay."

"That accounts for 't," she said in a tone of conviction. "Accounts for what?"

"For the way he treats ye. He'll no want ye here; he'll think there's a danger o' auld Nick leavin' you his money and

passin' him by."

"That's what Dannie-I mean, a laddie I ken-thinks;" and in spite of my youth and ignorance I thought it noteworthy that all my friends accounted for Big Pate's cruelty in the same way.

"Damned a doot o't," said the Wanderer; "and rather

than lose the siller he'll murder ye; he's quite fit for 't."

I knew the Wanderer was not mistaken here and I remained

silent, lost in gloomy forebodings.

"Ay," my companion remarked in a little, "he's a blackhearted villain that'll stick at naething. Ye'll clear out o' this at the first chance, if ye tak' my advice."

My heart was too heavy to let me keep up the talk. After

another silence I bethought me of a less painful subject.

"Ye're forgettin' to speak proper, Mary."

She gave a laugh. "It's easily forgotten when you've

been out of the way a while."

"I would like to get into the way," I said, though a little shamefacedly. "Look here, Mary, if you practise it along with me, I'll bring ye something frae the admiral's pairty."

"Party," she corrected with a laugh.

"That's richt, Mary; right, I mean," and my voice was earnest. "You'll correct me and I'll correct you. If you do, I'll fetch ye something from the admiral's party; " and I took pains to render the words properly this time.

"I wad rather ye'd let me in aside ye," the Wanderer said with a change of tone. "I'm devilish cauld;" and I heard her

moving the sacks among which she lay.

"No," I called out hastily; "stay where you are."
"It'll be warmer for us baith," she expostulated.
"I dinna care," I returned, forgetting my fine diction in

my earnestness; "ye ken what I was sent up here for, and I don't want anither breed."

The Wanderer was too hardened to resent the affront and glad, I suppose, to have company on any terms, she even complied with my whim when I asked her once more to use her best English. We talked till I was drowsy, the one correcting the other, and the last I remember was this:

"Mary, suppose you were walking in the street-in Randolph Street, maybe-and the rain came on and you were running to get out of the rain, and Miss Sess-I mean, anybody that was with you said it didn't look well to be running, would you say, 'Oh! Bother appearances'?"

"I would rather say, 'Damn appearances.' Well maybe

your way would be best, Jamie."

"And suppose you were going down the Lang Stracht with the ad-with somebody, and you asked them what the view minded you of, and they gave it up and asked you what it

minded you of, would you say 'Often told'?"

"What? Tuts! You're dreaming. Away and sleep." My new style of speech was so dear to me that, without thinking, I was apt to practise it with others than the Wanderer. Early on the Sunday afternoon Dannie Martin called for me and for once showed traces of excitement. The estate-carter. who lived with him in the bothy, had happened to mention that he had seen a goldfinch the day before. Where? Just inside the Satter Wood, at the top corner next the road. Was Ronald sure it was a gooldie? Ronald had replied that he wasn't born blind, and had gone on to say he had seen the bird two days earlier, not far from the same spot but outside the wood. Dannie hied to the Mailing, and as the neighbourhood of Lowis House was always a welcome haunt I accompanied him gladly. The Satter Wood began at the house and stretched towards the hill-country—greenwood below, rising to spruce and larch. We started our search at the Maiden's Rest, a small beautiful lake named from a girl of the Seton family who had drowned herself in it long, long ago. It was fed by a clear burn that ran through the wood all the way. Up this we proceeded first, for the stream was fringed at places with alder trees, and we thought the bird might be haunting these for the seed. On reaching the firs we turned and, each taking a breadth of the wood, moved downward.

As yet the search had been vain and Dannie was not in the best humour.

"I wadna ta'en Ronald's word for ony ither bird," he remarked, "for he couldna tell a craw frae a daw; but a man wi' a glass e'e should ken a gooldie. And then Ronald said that the first time he cam' on 't it was pickin' the black-heids

at the roadside. And ye ken they dae that."

Again we chose a breadth apiece and climbed to the same limit as before, and in this way we searched all that part of the greenwood that lay between the house and the road. It was getting dusk, and we emerged from the wood in hope that the roadside might give us better luck. We walked side by side, and as the same keen scrutiny was no longer needed we could talk of other things. The most interesting was the admiral's tea, which had been postponed till later in January. Both the Church and the Sunday-school at Lucas had been holding soirées at the New Year, and it was thought advisable to leave an interval between them and the Lowis treat. We were both pleased at the delay. It meant that Miss Maymie would be at home till the end of the month. This was my consolation. Dannie's was different.

"It'll gie Teen mair time to get her new frock ready. Ye like a lassie to be wise-like when ye tak' her to a han'lin'.

Hoy-oy-oy!"

"I thought you didn't care for her," I said.

Dannie's disappointment with the goldfinch may have left him irascible.

"I thought you didn't care for her," he mimicked in peeping tones; "I thought you didn't care for her. What like a way's that to speak. And twa three minutes since ye said, 'I was cleaning out the straw-barn.' Cleaning out the straw-barn! What the ——'s wrang wi' ye?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! There ye're at it again. Can ye no say 'Naething?' D'ye feel like deein' or what? Ye're gettin' to be a dam babby. Ye dinna smoke and I havena heard ye sweer the day."

I made no defence and Dannie may have felt his onslaught to be too savage. It was in the indifferent tone common with

him that he resumed:

"Ye'll never get on at service except ye're a bonnie sweerer and can play the concertina. I can sweer wi' ony man o' my

wecht. 'Hoy, ye young ——!'" he yelled to some youngsters who were playing on the roadside bank, "' are ye for in to that park o' young grass? What the —— d'ye mean? If I catch ye ower that dyke, by —— I'll blaw oot yer brains.' That's the way to talk," he said, turning to me, and in a little he looked back at the frightened children and wound up with

his usual yell.

I was in better heart about this time than I had been ever since Big Pate came to the Mailing. The tasks that fell to me—to delve the corners of the ploughed fields, build up dykes, slash down briers with the hedge-bill-were comparatively light and had this to recommend them besides—they kept me away from my tyrant. One person about the farm thought I had too little work. Florrie and I were not the friends we had been. In my first half-year at the Mailing she had been rather kind to me, was always ready for a joke and, both when we were alone and still more in Bob's presence, was fond of caressing me, wanting perhaps to make her lover's mouth water. Florrie had this peculiarity, if it be one: she must captivate every male she knew, old or young; no other woman must have a share. She used to tease me about my supposed fancy for Teen Gillies and was piqued at it, though we were but children to her. For mischief I would provoke her jealousy, pretending that Teen and I were more gracious than we really were. Once she was like to tear my eyes out because I had got a letter which she guessed, and rightly, to have come from that little maid. In appearance Florrie was rather the genteel domestic than the farm-servant; her cheeks had only a faint tinge, her arms, which she usually kept covered, were white, and she was particularly trim in dress and smart in her movements. She had been intimate with Big Pate, I surmise, when he had lived at the Mailing before; certainly they were intimate very soon after his return, and that in spite of two considerations that should have kept them apart. Big Pate was known to be married, though his wife and he had been parted for years; and Florrie was understood to be Bob's sweetheart. The pair took pleasure, I could see, in hoodwinking the young fellow. Meaning looks would pass between them the while Florrie was allowing Bob to take some lover's privilege. I had once admired Florrie a little and had submitted, if not responded, to her caresses. Of late all this was changed. Her intimacy with my fiendish tyrant would alone have alienated me, and at the best it would have been hard for Florrie to keep her place in my regard. I now loved another—a very different being. Florrie might attribute my coldness to a growing love for little Teen; certainly, she came to dislike me; she made no protest against Pate's cruelty, soon she laughed at it and so gave Pate encouragement. If I got into trouble, as in the affair with the vermin, she treated me with a hardness she would never have shown when we were friends. Our quarrel now rose very simply. I was crossing the court one afternoon when Florrie came out of the milk-house, where she had been making up butter.

"Whaur are ye gaun?" she asked.

There was no reason why I should not have let her know. I was going to the byre for a spade, old Nicol having told me at dinner-time to clear out a ditch in the Saugh Park. Instead of satisfying Florrie I answered carelessly,

"What's your business?"

"Awa' and kindle the boiler-fire," she ordered, without heeding my impudence. The fire in the scullery had been allowed to go out, as often happened.

"Kindle 't yourself; I'm not your servant," I answered

loftily.

"Ye've a damned sicht ower little to dae. Kindle the fire when ye're budden."

"You've no right to bid me," I replied in my best English.

My calmness angered her, and she said viciously,

"It's a stick ye need to yer back, ye lousy little blackguard."
The allusion to my recent disgrace made me forget my dignity, and with a heat equal to her own I broke out,

'And you're a dirty low tinkler. I wadna lift ye aff the

road."

My anger calmed and even amused her. She gave a laugh.

"I thocht ye liked me, Jamie."

"Maybe; but I dinna like ye noo, I could spit on ye; the very sicht o' ye scunners me."

"I'll gie ye mair to scunner ye," and she advanced on me,

an evil look in her eyes.

But I was not afraid of this antagonist. I doubled my fists and faced her up. She stopped and eyed me for a little. Then she said.

"It's Pate ye're needin' at ye. I'll tell him and he'll sune tak' the impudence oot o' ye."

"And I'll tell Bob that you're cairryin' on wi' Pate."
Ere the threat was well out I trembled with fear. Florrie's emotion was as great. She turned white and glared at me

without speaking.

"By God! I'll —" she broke out when she could speak; but at once she checked herself, and, turning from

me, moved slowly towards the milk-house.

Had she asked me again to kindle the fire, I might not have complied but I should have answered civilly. She did not, and when we met at supper-time she had got over her anger. Indeed, my independence must have raised me in her esteem, for she was as pleasant to me as in our friendly times. But her gracious manner did not melt me. Now that I saw there was nothing to fear I gave her no more thought. My heart was filled with another image. To-morrow I would see Miss Maymie, for to-morrow evening was the admiral's treat.

## CHAPTER VIII

HE arrangement had been that I should call at Dannie's bothy, and when I arrived I found my friend swearing at a new white linen collar which refused to button at the back. The two men were in the bothy as well, and in the disjointed talk that went on the under-forester remarked,

"Man, I fairly thocht I saw that gooldie the day."

"Whaur?" we asked with one breath.

"No that damned faur frae the hoose, on that gean-tree aboon Nisbet's cottage. It was just fleein' aff when I got my e'en on 't, and I saw the wing-bars gey distinct though it was gettin' kin' o' grey. I follows it up and saw 't at the foot o' a rhododendron, and what was the damned thing efter a' but a hen-shilfie."

"I believe it's been a hen-shilfie ye saw a' the time, Ronald,"

said Dannie.

"Ye little deevil, d'ye think I dinna—" and Ronald made at my friend to reward him with a cuff; but Dannie sprang back, put up his fists and began working round the carter, a fellow six feet high. Both men roared with laughter, which increased when Dannie's collar slipped from his neck to the floor. The carter aimed a kick at it, and Dannie, at the risk of stopping the kick with his stomach, threw himself on the floor and kept his finery protected till danger was over. He had to get my help, however, before the refractory collar was made secure about his neck.

The riding-school at Lowis House had been fitted up for the treat. Tables, made of boards laid on trestles, ran in a row alongside either wall with a passage between. Only a few guests had ventured in when we arrived, and these had chosen places near the door. Dannie and I joined the group

that stood at the entrance looking in.

"We'll keep at the back, aboot the richt-haun corner there,"

said my friend after some talk with his neighbours.

This did not please me. I saw that the tables near us were presided over by the Lowis maids; Miss Maymie and her sister and friends were away at the far end. My beloved was in a white dress of some soft stuff; only at the puffy shoulder there was a touch of colour, a narrow band of greenish blue, the shade reminding me of a heron's egg. A narrow sash of the same hue bound her waist. Diamonds sparkled in her dress where it edged her bare bosom. When my eyes lighted on her—and that was at the first glance into the room—she was talking with a gentleman; rather, he was talking to her. Like the other gentlemen from the house, he was in evening dress. He was tall and spare, and his attitude and movements were easy. I could tell, little as I had seen, that he was neither soldier nor sailor. His hair was black and very smooth, his face of a darkish paleness, his features fine. As I saw him talking with, I felt sure, an ease like that of his attitude, a pang caught me at the heart, and yet, in spite of jealousy, I was drawn to the face. What drew me I could not tell at the time; it was years ere I knew.

"That's a lord's son frae England," said Dannie, as if he

had heard my unspoken question.

"Ye're a liar, then," said a giant who was leaning against the door-cheek, half-drunk already and with a bottle bulging out his breast-pocket; "for he's a duke's son and a lord himsel'. Isn't that sae, Wattie?" he demanded of the farm-grieve who was acting as a marshal and had come to the door to encourage us in.

"That's so, Simon. He's the Duke o' Daventry's son, the Marquis o' Soar, and he'll be duke himsel' if he lives long enough. But come awa' in, Simon; came awa', callans;

fill up the tables."

Instead of complying, Dannie moved further from the door and edged me with him.

"Teen canna be long noo," he said, "and there's room

eneuch."

I did not object. The guests were still keeping to the back, and I hoped that we should be forced forward when we did go in. But when the front began to fill, I grew alarmed and urged my chum to move. Teen might not be coming.

"Nae fear but she'll come, and there's seats at the back yet," said Dannie, somewhat uneasily, however.

"But we'd be better at the front. We could see and hear

everything."

"Folk dinna gang to a pairty to see and hear; they gang to enjoy themsel's."

Love taught me craft.

"Look here, Dannie; we'd get better served at the front; the ladies would be better to us than the maids."

My companion made no direct reply, though I could see

the argument was not lost.

"What time is 't, Simon?" he asked, for the giant had no more entered than ourselves.

"It wants one minute o' hauf-eight."

"Ye're fast."

"Ye're a liar. D'ye no ken that the sun rises by this watch o' mine. There's just twa o' the kind ever been made. I've

got ane-"

"And the Prince o' Wales has the ither. We've heard that afore. But here she comes. What keepet ye, woman?" and without staying for an answer he drew her behind him, looking to me to follow.

But a crowd was pressing in, and as my two companions passed into a bench I let myself be swept forward by the stream. My heart was thumping, but courage sustained me till I reached the table where Miss Maymie had been standing, and

by a lucky chance I got the end seat next the passage.

In a few minutes the admiral rapped on a table. Admiral Seton was a man of middle size, with good features, a sunbronzed skin, and hair that was still golden where it was not grey. It was from him Miss Maymie drew her beauty. The mother was exceedingly plain—a tall, stout lady with a face which some kind of trouble had left a purplish red. Miss Seton, though a kindly-looking girl, was also plain.

Miss Seton, though a kindly-looking girl, was also plain.
"It's ten minutes past the time," the admiral called out, and I could tell a resemblance between his voice and Miss Maymie's; "if you'll all be quiet for a minute, Mr. Marr will

say grace."

The minister asked a blessing and tea began. Anxiously did I watch to see whether Miss Maymie or the friend who helped her would attend to my side of the table. It was her friend. But the disappointment was atoned for a little later

Miss Maymie called her sister, who had a table on the other

side and was not busy at the moment.

"I was just thinking, Lennie, that we should have had another copy of that song Mrs. Meiklejohn was talking about. Her niece may want her own copy to sing from."

"I brought a book with the song in it," her sister said.

"Oh, Lennie! you think of everything."

They had been standing beside me as they talked and I edged closer till I felt my jacket touch her dress. Indeed, when she was turning away, her bare arm pressed against me.

Oh, the thrill of that touch!

When tea was over, the admiral again called for silence. He explained that the place would have to be cleared for a few minutes and be rearranged for the second part of the proceedings. We must not, however, go far away or wait long; the night was getting on. He supposed some of the men would want to smoke; the non-smokers and the ladies might like to look through the picture-gallery.

Dannie and his companion were waiting for me at the door. "Could ye no get in for the crood?" my friend asked, and I did not set him right. So happy was I that I talked more than the two. They should have come to the front like me: the table I was at had more than it could hold: a big pie had never been broken.

"Damned little pie we got, Teen," said Dannie sulkily; "they'll no feed fat that comes efter May Gentles and her

smatter o' bairns."

Teen had been rather distant to me till she understood that I had left her company through no fault of mine. Now she asked,

"Are ye gaun to the front when we gang in again, Jamie?"

"Of course; ye see a' that's gaun on."

"I think we'll gang forrit tae."

Neither of us responded. I felt I should enjoy the evening better without company. What Dannie thought I know not; what he said was,

"I think I'll hae a draw."

"Ye've nae business to be smokin'—a cratur like you,"
Teen remonstrated.

"Hoy-oy-oy! Jamie there'll please ye; he's gien 't up."
"Ha'e ye, Jamie?" she inquired with interest. "That's richt; it's a dirty trick—spit, spittin' a' ower the place.

Ye'll no be gaun to see the pictures, then?" she asked Dannie the next moment; and when my chum, after looking more than once at her and at his clay, answered, though with less than his usual decidedness, that "he thocht no; he thocht he wad hae a smoke," she turned to me, "Wad you no like to see the pictures, Jamie?"

"I dinna care," was my answer, and it told my feeling

exactly. I knew and cared nothing about pictures; I was

indifferent whether I saw the gallery or not.

A good many people, mostly the ploughmen's wives, were in already. With the outside of the gallery I was familar enough. It was new, compared with the rest of the house, and had been built since the last laird grew rich owing to the working of mineral on a property he owned in Clydesdale. The contrast between its light-coloured stone and the weathered walls of the house made it a striking addition, and without this it would have been remarkable enough. It formed a wing of the mansion, though it was separated from it by a few yards' space which was covered in with glass, and it stood far back, so far, indeed, that but for the breadth of this corridor, ten feet at most, the back of the house was flush with its front. The building was square, its walls blank, the light coming from the roof. When Teen and I found ourselves inside, the scene was so novel that for all my preoccupation I was interested. Not in the pictures, however, though these, running the whole length of the walls and covering them to a good height, made a striking show of colour in the glare of the electric light. The middle of the floor was filled with exotic evergreens, among which foreign birds of brilliant plumage perched and flitted. Common ones, like the lovebirds, I knew; most were strange, and I could have spent hours examining them. But our attention was called to the A young gentleman, tutor to the admiral's only boy, came into the room with Master Reginald and began describing the more important works. We had to join the group. The descriptions, full of names I never heard before, did not interest me much. "This is a scene in such-and-such a country. It's by so-and-so. The landscape is mostly dark, you see: it's a night scene, of course; but notice those little glints of moonlight here and there. You would hardly remark them at first; but once your attention is drawn to them you feel that the picture would be entirely different without them

That was a favourite trick of this artist." And so he went on, giving the main particulars about the most important works; one was interesting for its subject, another for the painter's repute, another for its age, another for its price.

"This," he said, stopping before one of moderate size, rather broad than high, "represents a scene in a monastery. This monk, you see, has just been punished for some offence.

French painters are fond of such scenes."

I had glanced carelessly at the picture, but in a moment every leading feature printed itself on my soul. There was a large bare room or hall into which a man had just been carried through a door that was still open. In front were men walking in twos; they were shaven, partly bald, dressed in hooded frocks. The person who had been punished was borne by three of his fellows, one holding up either shoulder, the third supporting his knees. The whole front of the body, which was entirely naked, could be seen. It was limp, as if without bones. The eyes were shut and one could tell that the man was senseless, but on the pallid face dwelt the agony under which sense had fled. Last in the procession came the man who had administered the chastisement—a swarthy giant, clad not in a frock but in breeches and shirt. He carried a knotted scourge; the scourge was red. On the frame of the picture was the title in French, so like the English that anybody could have made it out; alongside, however, was the English rendering: "A Case of Discipline."

As I say, I took in the features and felt the motive of the picture at a glance. Then a shuddering as from approaching nausea came over me and I turned away and staggered. Wee Teenie noticed my state at once and caught me, or I

should perhaps have fallen.

"What's wrang, Jamie? Ye're no weel. Sit down there," and she promptly led me to a black-leather bench that stood near. Then sitting by me she plied me with suggestions as to what might be done: Should she get some water? Would I go into the fresh air? But I put up my hand to stop her and I sat perfectly still, using my whole force to steady and recover myself. Nobody but Teen had remarked me and I was left at peace. By the time Wattie Chalmers came in to call us I was able to follow with the others.

"Dinna say onything aboot it, Teen," I cautioned her as

we joined our friend outside.

My sudden seizure had kept us among the last, and when we entered the hall, from which the tables had been cleared, we found most of the benches filled. Teen, and maybe Dannie, too would have been ready to go well forward, and we were forced farther than even I contemplated. Nowhere was there room for three till we came to the second bench from the front on the right-hand side, and here we settled, Teen between her two squires. The house party were already seated in chairs beside the piano, from which one bench alone separated us, and we had not well got into our places when the admiral rose to give the opening speech. He made it short; indeed, he did not seem at his ease when speaking: he was hesitating and jerky. Still, I liked to hear him for the sake of the voice. After saying how pleased he was that so many of us had come at his invitation, he explained why his wife and himself had been led to give the party. For some years a tenants' dance had been held, but this was the first ploughmen's treat. His idea was this. On an estate there were three different classes—the landlord, the tenantry, and the labourers, and all three were important. Let no one imagine, because he was a ploughman, that his duties were of no consequence. He had his place and his work just like the landlord and the farmer. Let each one, landlord, tenant, and ploughman, be content with his situation and endeavour to discharge its duties worthily. In this way all would contribute to the highest welfare of the estate, ay, of the nation.

After the admiral's speech visitors from the house sang or played, and during the music the company got rather noisy. Some of the ploughmen had brought bottles which must have been circulating freely in the short interval, for the hall was pervaded by a smell of whisky, and there was so much talking and laughing at times that the admiral had to call for order. He soon hit on the plan of giving a few minutes' rest between the songs to let the audience talk; when silence was called, they were more ready to obey. Dannie and Teen did their share of talking, the latter giving me as much of her attention as she did my friend. I had part of the sweets Dannie had brought her, and every now and then she would ask in a whisper, "Are ye a' richt noo, Jamie?" "Ha'e ye quite got ower yer dwaum?" "Ye dinna find the place over hot for ye?"

Little Teen, I fear, did not find me very responsive. My

eyes were on Miss Maymie, following her every movement; when she spoke to a friend I strained to catch her words. Above all, I longed for the moment when she would sing. And at last the moment seemed to have come. Her sister had played most of the accompaniments, and Miss Maymie, a book in her hand, now came over. Ah, the disappointment! She took her sister's place at the piano and the singer was one of the visitors, an overgrown scraggy schoolgirl. As Miss Maymie played a few bars for prelude the notes sounded familiar, though I could not name the air, and I waited with interest till the girl should sing. That voice—what a revelation! So pure, so sweet, so mastering! Above all, so free and effortless, working its effect with perfect ease. It reminded me of the blackbird's notes and, little as I knew, I recognised in the awkward girl the born singer. My eyes left Miss Maymie and were fixed on the schoolgirl as she sang:

> "O Mary, at thy window be, It is the wish'd, the trysted hour, Those smiles and glances let me see That mak' the miser's treasure poor.

How blithely wad I bide the stoure, A weary slave frae sun to sun——''

But I could not hold out. Emotions I need not try to name, for they were indistinguishable to myself-emotions countless, diverse, strangely blended, were working on me; I felt the blood shrink from my cheek, the water flood my eyes; my face twitched, quick gasps caught my throat, and, my self-control nearly gone, I bent my head and shook with sobs. Teen's arm was round me in a moment.

"Oh, Jamie!" she whispered anxiously, "are ye no weel again? Rise and we'll gang oot; I'll gang oot wi' ye."

But I held her off and managed to say something about being "a' richt the noo," and I raised my head a moment to confirm the words.

For all my agony I was aware of what was passing. As I had been able to keep down any outcry, I disturbed no one at first but my two friends. Little Teen, her caution forgotten in her anxiety, was whispering, "There's something awfu" wrang wi' him; he took no weel in the gallery," to which Dannie answered, "It's Big Pate; he's killin' him, the ..."

Some of the admiral's friends had now observed that something was wrong and were looking over with questioning eyes.

The girl who was singing faltered, and seemed in doubt whether to stop, till Miss Maymie, who had remarked nothing, glanced at her sharply. Soon my sobs grew less torturing and I wept tears that gave me relief. As my hand was searching for my pocket, Teen took it softly and pressed into it her new white handkerchief.

"Dry them wi' that, Jamie; never heed wattin' 't." Oh, simple kindness! little heeded by the boy: in man-

hood's memory so dear!

The song was ended and there was such uproar that I could sit up unnoticed and compose my face. The audience clapped and stamped and yelled "'core, 'core!" and after some consultation among the admiral's people the girl came forward again and repeated the last verse of the song. More cheering followed, and just then I happened to look at the gentleman with the smooth black hair. Very likely his eyes had drawn mine, for they were fixed upon me, and in them was something that startled me and made me forget my own trouble. It was years again ere I knew what the strange something was.

But the admiral rapped on the piano and called for silence. "We have with us to-night a friend from whom we must have a few words. He is known to us all and is respected by all. I mean our worthy parish minister, Mr. Marr. Mr.

Marr will give us a few words."

The minister was a stout, red-faced man about sixty. He spoke fluently, but his voice, though loud and deep, was husky

and he had often to clear his throat.

He had not meant, he said, to trouble us with any remarks. Admiral Seton, in his excellent opening address, had said all that was needed, and he had no doubt the company would rather hear more of the delightful music discoursed by the ladies than listen to his voice, which all of us had heard so often. However, as he had been called forward, he must obey the captain of the ship. The thoughts he would like to express were some that had been suggested by the admiral's own speech. Admiral Seton had pointed out very strikingly that there were and always must be different classes in the world, and it was on the relation of those classes that he would like to say a word. In these days a spirit of discontent was rife amongst the people. He was glad to be able to say there was little, if anything, of this in our parish; but it was rife enough elsewhere, and was encouraged, if not originated, by unscrupulous persons who would have us believe that the upper classes did nothing in return for the privileges they enjoyed. Now, there was a temptation for unthinking people to accept this doctrine. A ploughman sees the landlord of an estate riding about in his carriage, and he thinks the laird has a fine time of it-nothing to do but enjoy himself. He forgets the laird has the responsibility of managing his great estate. The welfare of all on those domains depends on him. That was an anxiety, a responsibility which the ploughman could not understand, which only those could understand who were in the position themselves. He did not ask the admiral's confidence, but he would take the liberty of saying this: if Admiral Seton cared to tell us, he would be able to say that at times the responsibility and anxiety of his high position were such that he would gladly have changed places with the poorest ploughman on his lands.

At this point the admiral nodded and said, "Hear, hear!" But there was an interruption of another kind. From near

the back of the hall came a loud growl,

"Dry up, auld Break-the-bottle."

Instantly a roar of laughter rose that might have lifted the roof.

Like everybody in the district, I knew the minister's nickname and why he got it. The former minister of Lucas had
been deposed for drunkenness, and the people were resolved
to have a sober man as his successor. They gave a call to
Mr. Marr, who led them to understand he was a teetotaller.
Not long after his settlement he was out one day curling, and
as he stooped to measure a shot a bottle fell from his breastpocket and broke on the ice. It was whisky. This had
happened more than twenty years ago, but as Mr. Marr never
became popular in the parish it was kept up on him. Any
new-comer was told the story the first time the minister's
name was mentioned. After the exposure he may have felt
it was useless to study appearances. At any rate, he took a
glass openly though not to excess.

The interruption caused the wildest commotion. The ploughmen and their wives roared with unrestrained laughter; even the admiral's party could not hide their merriment. Miss Maymie's eyes sparkled like the diamonds on her breast, and her lady-friends smiled though they would not understand

the joke. Two faces, besides the minister's, showed no sign of mirth. Mrs. Seton looked pained, her husband stern, and as the uproar continued he marched down the hall to

restore quietness.

When the growl first broke the minister's speech, Dannie and I had exchanged looks: we knew the voice. Big Pate had been drinking freely at the interval, and he was now clearing off a score with the minister. This was the story, as I heard it later. Once, when Pate stayed at the Mailing before, the minister had encountered him on a Sunday coming from Craigkenneth pretty drunk, and had rebuked him both for drinking and for not attending church. Pate had given the minister his nickname, and Mr. Marr, firing up, threatened to tell old Nicol. He did complain and Nicol spoke to his nephew, though in a way that showed he enjoyed the fun. Pate would know the value of the rebuke; none the less, he kept a grudge at the minister.

"I hope they put him oot," Teen said fiercely, as the admiral walked down the passage. All eyes were set in Big Pate's direction, and knowing his recklessness in drink I thought it likely that Teen would have her wish. However, after a few more growls Pate was silent, the admiral returned to his chair, and by degrees the audience grew composed. The minister had continued speaking all through the uproar, but when silence was restored he only kept us a minute or two, then sat down.

Ere the gathering broke up, the admiral intimated that his daughters would be waiting for us at the door with a small present. Any one who smoked-and he supposed all the men did smoke-would get a piece of tobacco; the others would get something as good. Being so far forward we were among the last to go. Miss Maymie and her sister were standing opposite each other at the door. Beside them were small packets which maids handed them, and these they gave the outgoing guests. Which of the gifts would Miss Maymie be dispensing? If the tobacco, I would join the smokers. But-whether from chance or choice-her sister was distributing the paper-covered lengths of twist, while Miss Maymie gave out little tin boxes which proved to contain chocolate. One of these became mine and I felt the night had made me rich. For the first time I had touched my queen, for the first time I had received a gift from her hands, for the

first time I had spoken to her. Like little Teen, who had passed out before me, but in better English than hers, I had

said, "Thank you, ma'am."

As I walked home that night living the delicious hours once more, I hoped I might find the Wanderer in the barn-loft. She had only visited me once since the three-nights' stay at the New Year, and that was after less than a week's interval. She was jaded and ill, and we had had very little talk. Since then I had found no chance of practising the lessons she gave me; Dannie's rebuke was too vicious to have me risk a repetition, and I had no other friend. When alone, however, I exercised myself, sometimes even uttering my thoughts aloud to learn how the language sounded, and I hoped the Wanderer, when she came, would find an improvement in her pupil. Every night I saw that the ladder was handy, the bole unfastened. The truth is, I see now, that it was for more than her lessons I prized her: she was company to the lonely boy. I had spoken freely to her almost from the first, had told her of my tyrant, how he thrashed me, how he made me rob the hens' nests, how he and Florrie were deceiving Bob. And this night I could have spoken to her of the one who was nearest my heart, and could have done so quite naturally and without letting the bird from my bosom. For I had promised to bring the Wanderer something from the admiral's party in return for her lessons in "speaking proper," and by good chance it was Miss Maymie that had handed me the gift. So I might talk of the loved one and raise no suspicion. But the barnloft was empty and I had to be my own confidant. I kept my word, however: ere lying down I hid the chocolate above the wall of the loft and covered it with an old jar to keep it safe. his line is the well and the was more round to the march

## CHAPTER IX

In Spite of our quarrel and of my open indifference Florrie was as friendly as ever, and for some days after the admiral's treat Big Pate gave me less ill-treatment than I had been used to. That something was making him keep his hands off me became apparent on the day of the

Lucas ploughing-match.

I mentioned further back that the men had got a holiday for the match at Maud, the arrangement being that they should have to stick at their work when the local contest came round. They never supposed that old Nicol would hold them to the bargain, especially as the Maud holiday had been spoiled by the weather. One night, then, as they were sorting the horses, they asked the day for the Lucas match, expecting it to be granted at the moment. But Nicol had a teasing way; he liked to make people feel his power. A bargain was a bargain, he reminded the men. There was more need of them at home: two parks of lea and all the red land to plough yet. Besides, it wouldn't matter though they missed the match; they weren't going to compete.

A day or two before the match he asked Pate what ploughmen he was to be guiding. Pate answered gruffly that, as his uncle knew well enough, he was not going to the match. What for? Because he hadn't got leave. And when old

Nicol assured him,

"I never meant to stop ye, and fine ye ken that,"

Pate only answered,

"Then ye shouldna ha' looked sae damned like it."

It was true that neither of the ploughmen would be competing. Big Pate was ploughed out: he had been first on two occasions; Bob, who had held the year before without being placed, had no wish to enter again. But it was for another reason they refused the holiday. Admiral Seton

was taking a great interest in his Home Farm, and he had coveted Nicol's best mare. The farmer should not have entertained the offer at such a time—the middle of the ploughing season—but a fancy price tempted him, and he did not breathe a hint till the bargain was struck. Pate was furious; not only did he lose the mare he had been so proud of, but the new purchase looked a very inferior beast. So he declined the holiday; it was a chance of shaming his uncle in the countryside. Bob followed his mate, and on the day of the Lucas match the Mailing ploughmen were both at work on their own

farm, though in different fields.

It was the first time the new mare had been out. She seemed a quiet beast and it was not with her Pate anticipated trouble, rather with the gelding. Durham, a powerful though not a big chestnut, had a queer temper and might not like his new neighbour. Besides, he would find an alteration in his work. Before, he had been the furrow-horse; now, as the stronger beast, he would be the lander; his place would therefore be strange and his draught heavier. Ere Pate and I reached the field, as soon indeed as we left the pond, the trouble started. Rose, the new mare, went steadily enough, but Durham gave her no peace. Now he would push into her, now he held back, all to regain his old place on the off-side. The mare's temper was well tried ere we got to the Rumbly Park, a small square field of ley on which no furrow

had yet been drawn.

I had been sent with Big Pate to guide. The change of horses made this necessary. First, we had to draw the feering for the head-rig, to draw, that is, a furrow right round the field, leaving, however, a few yards' breadth next the dyke for headland. Then we should have to trace feerings, or first furrows, here and there over the field. As these feerings rule all the work that follows, they must be drawn as straight as can be. Commonly, an expert ploughman needs only a feering-pole for guide; that is, he has a pole set up at the far end and keeps his eye on this throughout. Owing to the change of horses I was required to lead, and Big Pate, who was most particular about his work, had taken yet another precaution for the head-rig feering. All along the line to be traced he had stuck small spruce branches into the ground at an interval of fifteen yards or so, and my duty was to guide the horses so that they should pass one on either side

of the spruce twigs which the plough would then run

through.

We started, I walking at the mare's head. Big Pate, though he had kept down his hands of late, put no check on his tongue, and when yoking he had encouraged me by promising to run the coulter through me if the beasts went ajee by a hair'sbreadth.

From the first Durham was fractious, and in spite of my "Vain, Durham!" "Vain yet!" oft repeated, he struggled to get towards me. If Pate had consideration at all, it was for horses, and as we moved up the field he spoke but seldom to the pair, and only when it was necessary to myself: "Haud aff ye!" "Haud aff ye! No sae far though," or when in my excitement I was shouting too much or too loudly: "Less row, damn ye; ye'll start the beasts." I knew I was safe so long as we were moving, but what would happen at the far end? Pate's hands would then be free, and if the work was not to his mind I should suffer. When we stopped. then, I eyed him fearfully as I stood at the mare's head and waited till he examined the furrow. I scrutinised it with more concern than he. It was well drawn, the difficulties considered; not a spruce twig was left standing. Yet as Pate turned from the survey and lurched towards me I shrank. However, he had only come to tighten the short reins that attached the horses at the hames. We took the other sides of the field in the same way. The horses were now working better and needed less attention from both Pate and me. Only once did I get a big fright, and it was at the last feering. When we were midway Pate called "Haud to ye!" and-I suppose because the contrary direction had usually been given-I pushed the mare's head further off me. Pate cursed in a low tone that boded evil, and I felt that at the end of the furrow my punishment would come. The blunder had certainly disfigured his work, for though he had managed to level the next twig it was only by making a sharp twist in the furrow. When we reached the end of the line, Pate gave but one glance at the damage, then advanced on me. Why had I not done as I was bid? and with the words he raised his big hand. I looked for nothing but to be felled outright. What was my surprise, then, to see the hand stayed for a while in the air, then drop slowly to his side! The change that passed over his swarthy face terrified me almost as much

as the threatened blow; it showed what an effort was needed to master his hands. After glaring at me for a while in silence

he took out his pipe and smoked.

In a little we started to draw the feerings in the body of the field. Pate had calculated, I suppose, that the pair would be less troublesome by then and he had not taken such elaborate precautions. He had merely dug out spadefuls of turf at wide intervals, and through the holes thus made the plough had to pass. The horses were now drawing so well that I might have been dispensed with, and I got no ill-usage from Pate beyond an occasional curse. When I left the field with a whole skin I was astonished, and even a little afraid, at my luck.

But ere I reached the steading my heart was as heavy as though my body had been covered with weals. At the cross-roads I encountered Ronald coming down the Lang Stracht with a cart-load of boxes. I stopped and asked, with an attempt at wit, whether he was flitting. He was going to Craigkenneth station, he told me, with the luggage; the Big House folk were leaving.

"They're for the sooth o' England, I hear, Ronald?"

" Ay.

"They'll likely be awa' a guid while?" I asked with feigned indifference.

"I question if they're back noo tae August."

It was only what I looked for, yet it added to my desolation. One hope remained: I might catch a glimpse of Miss Maymie ere her departure.

"The carriage 'll likely be doon sure, Ronald?"

"What carriage?"

"The carriage wi'-wi' the Big Hoose folk."

"The Big Hoose folk left last nicht."

As I turned in to the Mailing, I could hardly trail myself along. Two or three days later, as I was washing up the dishes after the men's dinner, Bob remarked to his neighbour,

"I think I'll awa' up the nicht and get Bauldy to gie me a cowe. My hair's faur ower long. Ye'll mebbe sort the horse

yersel' the nicht."

Pate looked at him for some seconds without speaking.

Then he said,

"Wait, man, till the morn's nicht. Auld Nick 'll be at the dinner, and he'll no ken whether ye sorted the horse or no."

"Ye're richt, Pate. I dinna want to be behaudin' to the

auld beggar."

"You'll gie us a haun, Jamie?" Pate asked with unheardof civility, and touched by his manner I assented instantly.

The next day at the same hour the arrangement was again

mentioned, and Pate said as civilly as before,

"Ye're no to be gaun alang to Dannie's the nicht, mind;

ye're to help me wi' thae horse."

There was not much to do, for the horses were thoroughly attended to as soon as they were unyoked, and all we did at eight o'clock was to give them a drink, shake up their bedding, and put a little hay in the hack. Old Nicol was not there to superintend. It was the night of the ploughing-match dinner, to which all subscribers were invited, and, though my old uncle had been greatly talked about for not giving his men the holiday, he went to the dinner to get the worth of his subscription. Pate and I were alone.

"Rin roon', man, to the foal's lowse-box," he said, as he locked the stable-door; "I maun hae drapped my knife there when I was layin' the strae. There's the licht;" and he

handed me the stable-lantern.

The admiral had induced Nicol to part with the foal as well as the mare. Pate had put fresh straw on the floor that afternoon, for the red bull was to be shifted into the empty loosebox. I went round and began searching. While busy, I heard quick footsteps; the next moment Florrie entered with a kitchen-lamp.

"Is-" she began; then, changing the question, "Are

ye a' by yersel', Jamie?"

"Ye can surely see," I answered shortly.

"And what are ye aboot? Are ye lookin' for something?" As I wanted to find the knife, I told her and she joined in the search. Her lamp gave a much better light; still, no knife was to be seen. While we moved about, Florrie occasionally

came against me—by design, I was sure.

"It's just like lad and lass," she said once, "me and you bein' here thegither;" and she looked at me with a strange glow in her eyes. The look, more even than the words, disgusted me, and I stooped again without speaking; but she went on, "Ye're gettin' quite a man, Jamie; ye're grown hauf a heid since the Term. Ance ye get filled up a wee, ye'll be a braw lad."

I shrank from her advance, but ere more could be said a heavy step sounded outside and Big Pate came in. He, too, had a lamp, the bothy-lamp.

Florrie, I had often noticed, was never to be caught. She seemed noway confused, indeed she laughed pleasantly as she

said.

"We havena found yer knife yet, Pate."

He growled for answer. It was only after he locked the

door and pocketed the key that he said,

"We'll see what else we can find. Gie's yer lamp;" and he set her lamp and his own inside the hack. The loosebox, a good-sized place at the end of the steading, was dark even by day, having only a skylight; now, with the lamps and my lantern it was clear enough.

The locking of the door, the arranging of the lamps—these preparations woke my terror. I knew that the three of us did not find ourselves together in such a place, at such an hour, by chance. All my fear of Pate revived; I trembled

and shrank before his scowl.

"What the ---'s this ye've been sayin' aboot us, ye

chalk-faced beggar?" he demanded.

I understood it all now, and my voice alone would have betraved me as I faltered,

"I wasna sayin' onything."

"Oh, ye wisna. D'ye hear that, Florrie? He's makin' ve oot a leear."

"Leear himsel'!" she said viciously. "Did ye no say ye'd tell Bob that Pate was cairryin' on wi' me?"

"D'ye hear that?" demanded Pate, with awful oaths as I remained silent. "Can ye deny 't?"

I felt something must be said in my defence: the punishment might be mitigated; that was the most I could hope for.

"I never meant to tell on ye," I nerved myself to say.

"Oh, ye didna! Ye just wanted to fricht us as if we was bairns. Ye'll find we're hardly that yet. Strip!"

Though he gave the command with all the strength of his

deep voice, I could not obey for terror.

He seized me.

"Damn 't if we've time to waste on you;" and hauling the lantern from my hand he began tearing off my clothes. "Catch the legs o' his breeks," he called to Florrie, who obeyed. In

a minute I was perfectly naked, and Pate kicked me from him with his knee. He made an obscene joke as he drew out something that had been protruding from his hip-pocket. I knew it for part of an old belly-band of Prince. The leather was thick and almost as stiff as wood. He thrust it into the woman's hand. "In to him, Floss!" he cried.

She gave a queer laugh as she handled the strap.

"In to him!" Pate cried again. "D'ye think we've a' nicht to wait? They'll be hame directly. Noo, my beauty," and taking her by the waist he pressed her forward on me; "let's see hoo ye gang aboot yer wark." She gave another laugh and I was aware her excitement was growing, and when Pate whispered, "Up wi' the belt," she obeyed at once. "Bring it over 'm noo!" and the strap smote my back. "After 'm, noo!" and she followed as I jumped away to escape another stroke.

There was little room to avoid her, for Pate's neighbourhood was as much to be dreaded; still, on trying to strike me again

she missed and stumbled.

"Damn it!" cried Pate. "Is that a' ye can dae? I'd never let a rag like that master me. Shorten yer grip and at 'm again; it's fine practice for ye. That's better," he went on as she caught me a slash; "ye'll dae yet. The same again! Just imagine it's a bairn o' yer ain ye're at. In to 'm! In to 'm!" and he mixed obscene direction with his commands till the woman, worked to the greatest excitement, lashed at me in fury. But as she sometimes missed, Pate was not yet satisfied. He caught me by the wrists. "Now ye'll get at 'm;" and Florrie brought the belt over me as hard and as fast as she could draw. Then I was released and the chase began anew, Pate sometimes catching the woman by the waist to excite her with his touch. But I ceased to run and sank in a corner, where Florrie had me at her mercy.

"Now ye have 'm. Speir 'm his questions," Pate directed; and Florrie, pausing every now and then in her work, would

ask,

"Will ye tell on us?"

"No, no," I moaned.

"Gie 'm something to mak' sure," Pate ordered; and the belt came down on thighs, on hips, on back, anywhere.

"And will ye put on a fire when I bid ye again?"

" Ay, ay."

"And will ye beg my pardon and Pate's pardon for sayin' ye'd tell on us?"

" Oh ay."

"Dae 't, then;" and with strokes to quicken me I moaned,

"I beg yer pardon."

There seemed to be a cessation of the strokes; then the woman resumed,

"And will ye-"

But this is all I can tell; endurance had reached its limit; sense left me.

When next I was conscious of anything it was of having some burden on my back too heavy to bear. It might be a great rock crushing me flat. Yet it was not a rock, for it was full of knife-points which it pressed steadily, remorselessly into my flesh. Feeling that it was crushing the breath out of my body, I tried to move from under it; that was the only way to escape, I felt, for it was too heavy to shift. Even to escape from below it seemed impossible. I was no more able to move than one in a dream. But the keen knifepoints were driving themselves into me so deeply that I must make a struggle, though I perished in making it, and darkly, blindly, more feebly, more slowly than a worm, I crawled. A long way it was, but at last, at last! I had crawled from under the load; only the knife-points remained. Here comes another blank in memory. When sense returned, I was so much myself that after a short while's thought I could recall what had happened—the flogging in the loose-box, my fainting. The knife-points that were now piercing and scorching my back must be, then, the weals and gashes from Florrie's strap. I writhed and moaned, but they burned on. I became aware of something rough moving over them; though rough, it did not heighten the torment; rather, it brought soothing wherever it touched. What it was I could not tell; it was a thing so blessed that I submitted without question; I only prayed it might not cease. I may have moved a little or the movement may not have been mine; at any rate, I felt something smooth against my arm. There was no mistaking the familiar feel: a dog's hair. Then I knew that I lay in the barn-loft and that Ranger was licking

Through the dark hours I lay, that is, I writhed, moaning the while. I shivered with cold, for I was naked, and clothes

would only add to my torture. Yet for all my torment of body and soul, thought was not dead; after a time, indeed, it was working with strange activity. Yes; in conditions so unlikely an inward change accomplished itself; a resolve,

new to my nature, was born.

As I lay in agony I heard a noise at the barn-door below, and I knew—for sense was keen—that Florrie had come to waken me. But I gave no answer to her call. Soon her steps were heard on the stair and, after a pause, on the floor, then I heard a cry. Still, I lay motionless. It was only when her hand touched me nervously that I stirred; the touch filled me with such disgust, such hate, that I was sickened and had strength to push the hand away.

strength to push the hand away.

"Ye gied me a fricht, Jamie," I heard her say. "It's—
it's time to rise. Get up and put on yer claes. Ye'll be better
when ye're up." As I did not move or answer, though my
face must have taught her I was quite myself, she went on,
"Come and I'll help ye. I—I was mebbe ower hard on ye,
Jamie. I—I didna think it wad ha' been sae bad as that.
Try and get up, man; it's past the time. I'll gie ye a haun."

Again I thrust out my hand to save myself from the touch and I struggled to rise. The cold must have stiffened the wounds on my back and thighs, for at first I could not move, and for all my resolution the effort wrung moans from my lips.

"Let me help ye," the woman said again entreatingly, as I tried to cover my blood-stained body; but I looked at her and the look kept her off. In a little, however, she resumed her talk. "I wad never ha' dune 't, at least I wad never ha' used ye like that, if it hadna been for Pate. And I was nearly as bad as you. I fainted; did ye ken that? Pate thocht I wad never come roon'. I'll gie ye something to hale yer back, and I'll tell the master ye're no just yersel', and he's to be easy wi' ye for a bit, and ye'll sune be a' richt." I did not speak; I only took care she should not touch me.

All that day I went through my work breathing no hint of suffering. And it happened to be trying work. Bob was finishing a head-rig, and for the last two furrows, those next the dyke, he had only room for one horse which I had to lead. There was no chance of sparing myself. Clenching my teeth, I set my thoughts on the task and tried to forget my pain. Bob, who had been kinder to me of late, must have suspected that something was wrong, for he asked once if Pate had been

"leatherin" me; but I said it was nothing, I should soon be "a' richt." Old Nicol remarked on my stiff movements and trailing gait as I was writing a letter for him in the evening.

"Florrie tells me it's the growin' pains that ails ye, Jamie. And faith! ye're shootin' up fast, I doot they're ower guid to ye in the kitchen. I can mind I was bad mysel' when I was your age; but they'll sune leave ye." But to old Nicol

as well I said nothing.

That night, however, in the bothy, I gave the first sign of the change that had passed over me. Usually, after we looked the horses at eight o'clock, I brought in the eggs which I had stolen during the day and had hidden in odd corners about the steading. To-night no eggs were forthcoming. The men did not remark the omission for a time; it was a Friday, and they were both busy with weekly papers. As Pate rose to strip for bed he demanded,

"Whaur's thae eggs for the morn?"

"I've nae eggs," I said stonily.

For a few seconds he did not speak, so great was his astonishment.

"Ye've nae eggs!" he repeated at last; "and what's the reason ye've nae eggs?"

"I'm no gaun to tak' ony mair," I was able to say, though

it took me all my courage.

"I see," Pate remarked calmly. "Then I'll just have to find a way o' makin' ye tak' some mair;" and he leisurely strode over to the peg where the old halter was hanging.

But ere he could get it down, Bob spoke:

"It's high time the thing was stoppet; it's gane on ower long as it is, and I'll no let anither egg come into this bothy."

His neighbour glanced at him with contemptuous surprise.

"You'll no let anither egg in here! And wha the —— are you that's to keep them oot? Let me hear that again and you'll go oot yersel', heid first."

"Dae as ye like aboot the eggs," said Bob, in a tone that told of vanishing courage; "but I want naething to dae wi' them. We'll get into a damned row yet ower the heid o'

them, and I want to be oot o't."

"Ye'll no let anither egg into this bothy," Pate repeated.

"So you're master in the bothy."

"I dinna want to be master, You can tak' the eggs if ye

like. I'm only sayin' that I'll no tak' them whether Jamie

brings them or no."

"Because," Pate went on, "if naething's to come into the bothy but what you like, then you and me 'll have to settle wha's to be master here?"

He was so bent on a quarrel with Bob that he took no notice of me, and I edged towards the door and made out. It was true that I would have died rather than yield; still, I was shaking with excitement and fear. I hung about the yard till long after the lamp was out, and only ventured into

the bothy when Big Pate was snoring.

He may have felt that my resolution was fixed or, more likely, his neighbour's conduct had made him uneasy; at any rate, my tyrant did not try to make me resume the eggstealing. But in revenge he let his cruelty rage like a flood. My body was covered with wounds that never healed. Work was turned into a torture: every task gave scope for his hate. One day, for instance—it was well on in February—we were slaking lime. Many cart-loads of shells lay in a bing in the Rash Park; water had been lashed over it to dissolve the shells when it was first laid down, but it had now to be turned over and slaked thoroughly. Bob and I were sent down to the burn with the water-cart. On reaching the pool from which the water was usually drawn we backed the cart till it touched the fence; I filled a pail and handed it up to Bob, who, standing with one foot on a stob, the other on the cartwheel, emptied the pail into the filler on the top of the barrel. By the time he had the pail emptied and set on the fence I had the second ready and within his reach. So we went on till the barrel was full. When we reached the field, we stationed the cart near the bing of lime and set behind it an old boiler. When this was filled from the barrel, my task was to fill a pail from it and lash the water on the lime as Pate and Bob turned it over with shovels. When the boiler got nearly empty, Pate drew the plug from the barrel and filled it.

"What the — are ye waitin' for?" he demanded of me on one of these occasions. "Can ye no kep the water

frae the bung-hole?"

It was a little ere I understood. I was not to wait till the boiler was full, but was to catch the water as it gushed from the barrel. This would save a little time. As I obeyed, he thrust in the plug but only far enough to make the water

spirt out round it. Seeing my clothes drenched, he remarked,

"That'll learn ye to keep yer place."

Next time the boiler had to be replenished he whipped out the bung without warning, so that the water spouted over my legs and feet. As the barrel had been getting down, the water could not gush so far as at first, and the boiler should have been moved nearer. Pate knew this, of course; but it gave him a chance to torment me.

"Why the devil did ye no shift the boiler?" he demanded, hastily plugging the hole; and while I was trying to wring my wet trousers, he sent me sprawling among the slush.

He went on to fresh tricks. At one time he would make a grab at the plug but would not withdraw it, and he smiled grimly at my vain alarm. Another time, after inserting it, he would whip it out again if I happened to be near. Nor could I lose time guarding myself; a cuff or a kick, felling

me among the mud, would have punished the delay.

The drenching made me uncomfortable enough, but this was anything but the worst. The ground was steeped with water, and we were moving in a slush of mud and lime that went over the boot-heads. The men were prepared for this and wore stout leggings; I had no protection, for I had not been warned of the danger. Next morning my ankles were so sore that I could not lace my boots tight. It was only when Bob saw me hirpling about and asked if my feet had got fired with the lime that I could account for the mischief. On looking my ankles at night I found a broad red ring about each, and the pain was as keen as though I were being branded. By day, though I left my boots open at the top, I was like to scream with agony when walking over the hard court. On turf or red earth the relief was so great that what to others would have been pain to me was joy.

All the torture, all the cruelty, the blows, the kicks, the floggings, the unfeeling tricks and jests, I bore in silence; for I had resolved to complain to no living soul, to give no one, even Dannie, my confidence. I would take all the cruelty as it came; never would I implore Pate to spare me, never would I offer a word of excuse or defence, and never, if I could help it, would I shed a tear. Did I hope anything from this—any relief, any escape? None. What, then, inspired me? The recklessness of the helpless and desperate, nerving them to bear all and almost glory in their suffering, like the Indian

savages who laughed at their Christian persecutors and even showed them new tortures to inflict. I could have escaped all this agony by running away, but I could not leave Miss Maymie's neighbourhood. Some day the end would come. I should die under Pate's kicks and blows; but the separation from Miss Maymie would not be due to me. Though, at times, I was forced to see the truth, that is, I was beginning to despair. My queen was more in my thoughts than ever, but I felt that instead of getting nearer her I was being pushed down, down, and should soon be swallowed by the darkness. This despair had threatened me often since that awful night, and it was strengthened by one who had nothing but kindliness to me in her heart. On the second Sunday after the flogging I was dragging myself up the Lang Stracht about the usual hour of visiting Dannie. Not far from the head-forester's house I encountered wee Teen Gillies. She greeted me laughingly, and told me she was going to see her friend, the maid at Cambuslochan.

"Oh ay," was all my response, laughter being far enough

from my mood at the time.

Teen talked a little longer and then suggested, with the same light-heartedness,

"Ye've nae notion o' convoyin' me a bit?"

I answered stonily that I should have to go on, Dannie would be waiting for me.

"Ye'll be after that puir gooldie again?" she asked.

" Ay."

We seemed to have no more to say for we stood a little without speaking, and I was about to bid her good-day and trail myself on when she asked,

"Was ye in Craigkenneth last nicht, Jamie?"

" No."

"And Dannie tells me ye wasna in the Saturday afore?"

" No."

"Ye aye used to gae in on the Saturday nicht."

"Ay; maistly."

There was another short silence; then Teen asked.

"What's wrang wi' yer legs, Jamie? Ye canna walk."

" Naething."

"Has Big Pate been leatherin' ye again?"

I did not speak; I looked away.

"Jamie," the girl said earnestly, "ye're gettin' an awfu'

look in yer face. I canna bear to see 't. Ye looket frichtet afore, but it's no fricht noo-it's something waur; I canna tell what it is. Oh, Jamie! ye maun get oot o' that. They're killin' ye among them." As I made no response she went on, "Wad ye no leave them, Jamie?"

I shook my head.

"What can I dae for ye, Jamie? Tell me, and I'll dae 't." I was going to answer that nobody could do anything for me, but feeling that the speech was too grand both for wee Teen and myself, I merely said that I should soon be "a' richt."

We stood silent again till, feeling uncomfortable, I said, "I'll need to be movin'. Dannie 'll be wearyin' and Jeanie 'll be wonderin' what's come ower ye."

But little Teen was at the end of her dissembling. Bursting

into tears she cried.

"It wasna for Jeanie I cam' at a'; it was to see you, Jamie. Oh, Jamie! can I dae naething for ye? I wad gie

my heart's bluid to help ye."

I did not respond, and again we stood a while without speaking. Teen was drying her eyes with her handkerchief, and her tears made me yet more uncomfortable; so after moving about awkwardly for a little I repeated that I should "sune be a' richt," and with a "guid-day, Teen," trailed myself

But on the first shaving-night, as I was putting up the glass, I caught a glimpse of my own face. It shocked even me. Not that the face was too pale for one who worked afield, or that my blue eyes had the startled look that had dwelt there for months. There was something different, something more awful, though, like little Teen, I could not tell what it was.

## CHAPTER X

FTER that scene in the loose-box Florrie had tried to make it up with me, excusing herself, blaming herself. To her words I answered nothing. For a time she showed me some kindness, taking care that I was better provided for in the kitchen; of this, again, I made no acknowledgment. Once, as I was finishing my dinner, she told me to kindle the boiler fire in the scullery. For the first time I broke silence.

"No," I said in my most determined tones.

"Ye'll be as weel," she said significantly, and, when I took no heed, she added, "Ye mind what ye got already. Will ve?"

" No."

My sullenness for the past days must have kindled anger in her heart; it now burst out.

"If ye've forgotten sae sune, I'll gie ye something to mind

ye;" and she made towards me.

I did not take any attitude of defence, I did not even rise from the table: I only looked at her. At my look, charged with undying hate, she stopped and quailed. Without a word she turned and left the kitchen. But once, not long after, she frightened me. It was on an afternoon. I was sweeping out the Wee barn when she came in to tell me that I was to go to the smithy with Roy as soon as I was done with my job. After giving the message she remained standing.

"Ye shouldna keep up spite, Jamie."

No answer.

"If I was to beg yer pardon, wad ye be freens again?"
I still kept silence and swept away at the floor. She came
a little nearer.

"D'ye ken, Jamie, I think that leatherin' has made me fonder o' ye."

I looked at her for warning, but the glow in her eyes was so loathsome that this time it was I who gave way. As she

took a step nearer, I dropped the besom and fled.

Towards the end of February the two men and I were over one day at the Five-acre lifting a corn-stack. The Big Mill should have been at the Mailing, but was busy and would not be round for another week. The beasts were short of straw, and Nicol had ordered us to bring in one of the stacks and thresh it with our own mill. While I was on the stack forking to Pate on the cart, he whispered, "Haud on!" Then, with a fierce look and gesture to command silence, he pointed ahead. A fine cock-pheasant, quite tame with the hard weather, was pecking round the furthest stack.

"Slip doon and break its neck wi' a stane," Pate ordered

in a hoarse whisper.

I knew there were heavy penalties for killing those precious birds; besides, birds of every sort were sacred to me. I slipped down the ladder, then, resolved to let the pheasant escape. There were few stones near. I picked up a small one that would not have been dangerous had it hit; but I took care to miss. Pate uttered a wild curse, and when the pheasant, after running a few yards, resumed feeding, he called to me in low but distinct tones,

"Tak' ane o' thae bricks and fell it or I'll plaster that dyke

wi' yer brains."

Beside the dyke lay the thatch that had been stripped off the stack, with the ropes and old bricks for holding it on. I seized a broken brick and flung it blindly. It found the mark

but too well; the pheasant lay dead.

I stood in horror. Bob, who was near with an empty cart, gave a loud laugh, but when Pate ordered me to hide the bird, I hardly knew what he said, and he had to quicken my senses with a threat and a curse ere I could obey. Across the dyke was a ruined cottage; here the pheasant was to be hid.

At night I came back for it and brought it to the bothy, where I had to help with the plucking and cleaning. The feathers did not come off well, and I got more than one cuff for awkwardness. But what was my shame, my remorse, when I saw the corn-grains lying in the bird's crop just as they had been swallowed when I smote him dead. The pheasant was set before the fire to roast overnight and the men discussed where the feathers should be bestowed. They could

not be burned: the smell might raise suspicion. The dunghill was not safe; it was on the roadside, and the feathers might be routed out by a dog. After long debate the men fixed on the Dale Planting, a strip of wood west of the house. The feathers were tied up in a newspaper, and the next morning, after being at Craigkenneth, I took over a spade and buried them in a hillock.

Two days later, as I was taking in the queys which grazed part of the day in a small grass field adjoining the Saugh Park, one of them jumped the low dyke and scampered into the plantation. Ranger could not manage her, and I went over to help. When chasing the beast through the wood, I found myself near the hillock, and there I noticed something that soon took all my attention. The mound had been tampered with since my visit; part of the earth was thrown up. Startled, I cast a searching glance around. There lay the bundle I had buried; the paper wrapping had not been taken off, or, if it had, it must have been replaced; but the string was gone and some of the feathers were sticking out.

I was terrified. Without daring to stop a moment and cover up the dreaded bundle I slunk away as if some eye were on me. While I was chasing the quey, I asked myself if the earth might not have been disturbed by some animal that the scent had drawn. But the question had already answered itself: my first glance had shown me that the plants on the hillock had been removed by human hands. There was no mystery. I had been watched either by a keeper or by one who had informed the keeper. Or else, and the conclusion was the same, someone prowling through the wood had noticed fresh spade-

marks, had searched, had made the discovery.

Here was something more fearful than Big Pate's cruelty. I should be exposed and punished as a poacher. I had killed a pheasant belonging to the admiral, to Miss Maymie's father. The desperate endurance that had held me up for weeks gave way. I felt I must share my burden with someone, though I would not tell the whole secret; that would be like speaking my own doom. On the next Sunday, then, while Dannie and I were again ranging the Satter Wood for the elusive gold-finch, I waited till we flushed a pheasant, and then remarked.

"They'd be gey hard on a body for killin' that gentleman."
"Hoy-oy-oy! I think they wad, the noo especially."

"What way the noo?"

"Close time. D'ye no ken that naebody daur touch a pheasant after the first o' this month, no even the admiral?"

"And him the laird! And the pheasants belongin' to

"Disna matter a damn. He could be punished tae if he

was fund wi' a pheasant in his hauns."

"Then," I suggested with faltering voice, "it wad be an awfu' thing if ony ither body was fund killing ane the noo?"

"Hoy-oy-oy! Next door to murder," my friend assured

"They'd maist hang him."

My terror rose to such a height that for the first time I turned to Bob and Big Pate for comfort. On the Monday night, while the men were lying on their beds smoking and I warmed myself at the bothy fire ere going up to the barn-loft. I observed.

"Wad they punish us awfu' if they fund oot aboot that

pheasant?"

The question, put without warning, made an impression: Neither answered at once. It was Bob who spoke first, but I could hear Big Pate raise himself in his bed.

"My God! they're no suspectin' onything?" cried Bob

in a startled voice.

"N-no, I suppose no; but if they had fund oot, they'd hae punished us awfu', wadn't they?"

"Hoo could they punish us?" demanded Big Pate in his gloomiest tones. "Wasn't it you that killt the beast? We did naething to 't."

"Naething but the eatin'," laughed Bob, now recovered

from his fright.

"Wha the hell's to ken we ate it? For ocht they ken, this blasted whalp micht ha' eaten as weel as killed it. We

could ha' sworn that if there had been ony a-dae."

Terror was added to terror and I had no more comforters. Had the Wanderer been at hand I should have told her all. But she had only paid me that one visit since the year began, and Miss Maymie's present still lay in the loft untouched. One day I met Nisbet, the head-keeper, in the Saugh Park not far from the fatal wood. He gave me a side-nod but did not speak, and I felt from his silence and the queer look with which he eyed me that he knew all and was merely waiting the right moment to pounce on me. Sometimes I had the strange wild motion that if Miss Maymie had been near I might have confessed to her. Then I would feel how humbling that would be. It was not as a suppliant that I had always pictured myself gaining her intimacy. I was to be the protector, I was to shield, to save my queen. But no matter; she was far away, and I should be exposed and punished ere she knew. Then she would hear the shameful story and be filled with disgust. Yes, Miss Maymie was far away. The

darkness was swallowing my one star.

I was coming up the Lang Stracht one forenoon some ten days after the affair of the pheasant. Old Nicol had sent me to the smithy with a broken harrow-tree, for though seedtime was still some weeks away, he was getting his implements in order for fear the smith should be busy later on. dragged myself up the road, the iron bar crushing my shoulder, a burden of despair bowing my soul, I was asking, as I had asked a thousand times already, How was it all to end? Suddenly a word of Bob, unheeded at the time, rose in my memory and made all clear. It was the day we were slaking the lime. Once, when Big Pate had felled me among the slush, Bob put in a mild word of warning: "Ye're gaun ower faur wi' the callan. Damned but he looks like daein' something desperate;" to which Pate had answered something about a "damned guid riddance." The words flashed into my memory now, and at once I saw my way. It was so simple; I wondered I had not seen it before. Indeed, I now understood that ever since the flogging in the loose-box I had been moving hitherwards steadily though unconsciously, and it needed but a flash at the right moment to show me that I was on the road. I was to die, and to die by my own act. Here was the escape from the present cruelty, from the threatened shame. And no unworthy escape; for even if my faults were afterwards exposed, the egg-stealing at the farm, the slaughter of the admiral's pheasant, people would acknowledge that I had made good atonement, all that I could make-I had died. Miss Maymie would hear of my death and the story of my faults would excite no disgust or contempt. I had wiped all guilt away.

The instant the thought of suicide flashed into my mind all the preparations seemed made; they made themselves. The place, the time, the way—all was plain. The Maiden's Rest—that was the natural spot. I knew the story: a girl of the Seton house had drowned herself there to escape a

step-mother's cruelty. I had a feeling that as I had much the same need it would be rather a fine thing to do the like. And since I meant to die, now was the time. Cruelty was always waiting me; if I went in to the farm just now, it would begin. I should escape that. Then the shame for the pheasant's death, though ready to fall on me, had not yet fallen: a few minutes more and it never would. How lucky it was, I felt, that the resolve had come at the time it did! Had I been working alongside others at the moment I could not have got away. As it was, I could carry out my purpose instantly. Nor was it likely that anybody would prevent me. The farmfolk, if they remarked my long absence, would conclude that I had been hindered at the smithy. There was no special work for me till the afternoon, when I was to go down to Barbeth to flag the Big Mill that would be threshing at the Mailing to-morrow. Well, they would have to get another flagsman, that was all. Even in trifles the chance was favourable: the iron bar on my shoulder would be a capital weight to sink me.

My step involuntarily quickened. The bruises on my body and thighs no longer ached, the rings on my ankles lost their fire. When, instead of turning in at the Mailing loan, I held the road to Lowis House, I had withdrawn my thoughts entirely from things without. I met only one person, and that was as I entered the Satter Wood. Hendry, the underforester, was on the footpath, hedge-bill in hand. I think he asked where I was bound with the swingle-tree. Certainly I made no answer. His other question I do remember: Was I looking for Wattie, the grieve? I said "No," and we went our ways. A few minutes more and I stood by the

lake-side.

It was a familiar spot and a favourite of mine. The lake, nearly an acre in extent, was artificial, an expansion of the stream that threaded the woods; but in the long years Nature had made it her own. Dannie and I had haunted it on Sunday afternoons last summer, when flag-flower and pondlily were in blow, and later when the sedges were so lush and plentiful that the lake in parts looked a field of chocolate-coloured wheat. I loved it best then, for young coot, moorhen, and ducks of different sorts swarmed in the reeds. Today I gave the scene no heed; one feeling only I drew from the bare trees, the rustling reeds, the sunless lapping waters

—the feeling of desolation. As I put down the harrow-tree and made ready the string for tying it to my neck, my thoughts were busy on a question that had just arisen. Should I leave a dying message? I was aware that many people who made away with themselves left letters explaining their motives. I did not need exactly to do that; the people that knew me would guess that I had sought an escape from Big Pate's ill-usage. But it would be hard to bear in my grave the guilt for the pheasant's slaughter. Should I not leave a dying declaration that the deed was not really mine but had only been done under pitiless compulsion? But even if pen and paper had been at hand to write the message, I should have had some trouble in preparing it. The story, to be told right, would be long. After all, it might not be believed. No; I would not write even were writing possible. Another question, kin to this but more, far more momentous, was pressing me, though the answer was never in doubt. Should I reveal my love for Miss Maymie? Not, of course, in a way to let others know, but only that she might be sure of it herself. Never! Even had it been possible to disclose it to herself alone, pride would have kept me silent. Ever since my passion rose, I had believed, except in the darkest hours, that it had made itself known to my mistress. I might be wrong. Ah, the desolation of that doubt! Still, as I had nursed the darling treasure in my own bosom till now, there it would abide.

These questions settled, I hurried on the preparations for death. I had already fixed on the spot, a place where the bank was steepest and the water lay deep on a soft bed. It was not many yards from where I stood. As I moved towards it, carrying the swing-tree in my hand, keeping my eye set on the spot that would soon have my body, a chuckle caught my ear and woke such thrilling associations that, in spite of the resolve upon me, I started and cast a glance aside. The sound had come from the water's edge and near the spot where I had been standing. Looking round I caught a flash of gold, then a point of glowing scarlet. It was the goldfinch.

I stood spell-bound. The bird had been pecking at some reeds that grew by the lake; now it was flitting towards a low sallow. I moved a few paces on to watch it better. It had settled on the bush and was pulling at the flossy buds that had opened at the approach of spring. As I took yet

another step, it gave the same chuckle, so strange yet so familiar, and flew into the wood. I glanced after it with strained eyes, but it had vanished. Slowly I turned and moved to the spot where it had risen. Then for the first time

I bethought me that I had forgotten my errand.

I looked at the water, at the spot I had chosen for my death. It had drawn me so strongly before; it looked strange, alien now. Not my resolve only, my whole spirit had changed. That call had startled me out of my old life, and though I had tried I could not have returned to it. I could understand in part how the change had come. Not from the note of a new bird, but from the associations that note had waked. At the moment I had heard the one voice that could have arrested me and, even after my eye had witnessed to the truth, the confusion did not at once depart. When some minutes had passed, I recognised how absurd it was to blend thoughts of my mistress with the image of this chance-seen bird; but by that time my old mood was gone and could never return. No. This was not the way of death for me; I was not to be my own slayer at all.

I loosed the string from the harrow-tree that I had kept in my hand all the while and after a parting glance at the lake, which still wore its unfamiliar aspect, I proceeded through the park to the road. A certain excitement, a certain agitation was on me yet. As I drew near the farm, I felt other signs of the change. I had grown less desperate, less careless; I was apprehensive of the reception I should get after my delay. Something else that had given me awful concern of late came to mind, and I resolved to deal with it too. In a word, my mood was more what it had been ere the flogging in the loose-box. When I reached the Mailing, I told Nicol with anxious seriousness that the smith had been busy. He took the excuse and spoke of my errand for the afternoon. He would tell me himself when it was time to start for the

Big Mill.

## CHAPTER XI

ARBETH, where I was to meet the Big Mill, was three long miles off. As usual, Nicol had left me too little time; yet I did not set about my errand at once. The doubt that troubled me must be laid though time were lost. When I reached the planting where the pheasant had been buried, I entered it and made for the hillock. The spot was as I had left it, except that the newspaper was nearly into pulp with damp. I had bethought me that a scrutiny of the uprooted plants might help me to read the puzzle. I looked at them closely. The green blades lay strewn about, and I noticed-what I had not remarked for alarm the first time-that they were turnip-shaws. Some chance-sown turnips must have been growing on the mound. Might it not be, then, that some tramps, or perhaps some children of the neighbourhood, had come on the turnips and pulled them up? My mood inclining me to the answer, I decided it was the true one. What best to do? Cover up the signs of guilt and then, if I could, dismiss all care. I found the hole I had formerly dug; again I laid the pheasant to rest and with my foot I kicked a lot of earth over it and strewed the turnip-shaws above. Then I started for Barbeth.

Though legs and ankles were sore, I walked with new spirit. The solution I had chosen of the pheasant mystery seemed a good omen for my fresh start in life. Even without it the world would have looked other than before. I had come back from the dead, and after lying awhile in the grave. It was not that things looked much fairer, but they looked different. Had I been shut up in the house with illness and come out after long months, I should have felt somewhat as I did now. And it is true that the change was for the better: it was as if I had seen the world last in winter, and looked on

it next in early spring

Half a mile from Barbeth as the crow flies, a lane strikes off the road, giving a short cut to the Fair Green. If I chose it, I might miss the Big Mill, which would, of course, keep the main road. No smoke was visible as yet, no snort was to be heard. I would take the risk.

The Fair Green is at the north end of the village—a large grassy common nearly square. It has its name from the fair that had been held here on midsummer day for many a generation. Once a notable market for cattle, still more for horses; now a mere gather-up of shows. The rest of the year the green is a camping-ground for vagrants. This afternoon there were two caravans, a red and a green one, on the south side; in a corner opposite stood a tilt-cart; beside it the owner was heating a can on a stick fire. I went over to ask if the Big Mill had passed.

He was a man of middle life, a thorough gipsy in look. Speaking with an English twang he informed me the Mill was not by, and when I seated myself on a shaft to rest he started

talking.

"You don't know anybody hereaway that happens to want a good coacher? A willing animal, neither too light nor too lumbering, fit for cart, trap or plough? I'd let it go a bargain, for I've a big stock of cattle at this moment and want to reduce it."

Two beasts were grazing a dozen yards off. On my asking which he meant he indicated a black mare that had her off

side to us.

"She's gaen in the fore-knees," I pointed out, "the off fore-knee badly. Has she been wrocht on the streets?"

The man smiled, and seeing, I suppose, that bluff was useless, told me he had bought the mare in Edinburgh, where she had been driven in a grocer's van.

"She micht be usefu' for a farmer," I suggested. "Her knees micht come richt if she was on the soft land awhile

instead o' the causey."

"Say," said the fellow, "you're in this line? Farm, eh?"
When I satisfied him and named the place, he went on, "You never think what a —— fool you are to serve the farmers?
Worst slave-drivers on the face of this —— earth —— And what'll you make off them? Question if you've a dozen pounds a year?"

"Five pounds ten in the half-year," I replied, and without

knowing it I had altered my speech to match with my

neighbour's.

"There you are," and he swore fresh oaths. "A lad that knows horses as if he had kept a breeding-stud from his cradle. Eleven quid for a year's work. And most of it lifted in advance, eh?"

I assured him my fee for the running half-year was still in

my master's hands unbroken.

"That's better. You're a steady lad, a saving lad, and that makes me want the more to get you out of your poor trade. What about changing it and trying mine, eh? No work, nothing but driving in your own turn-out, seeing the country, buying horses, riding horses, breaking horses, selling horses for twice the money you paid for 'em. How's that for a life?"

Though aware that the fellow was either chaffing me or perhaps in the hope of getting my fee into his clutches wheedling me, I could not keep down a pleased feeling. So rarely had I been praised! So seldom had any parts of mine

been recognised!

Should I be in Craigkenneth on the ploughmen's holiday? he next asked. That was some time in May, eh? First Monday after the fifteenth? Well, he would be there as sure as there was a sun in heaven and I must be ready to go into company with him then. I laughed, though rather sadly, for the thought came over me that I should have many a cruel thing to bear ere the three months passed; but my new friend continued in his flattering strain:

"Say, what's your name?—Bryce, James Bryce—I fancy you. 'Pears to me you know horses down to the ground

and you can talk like a book."

And indeed I had a pleasure in exercising my long-neglected art of "speaking proper." The gipsy's remark reminded me of her who had been my teacher, and it suddenly occurred to me that he, a vagrant himself, might know of her and be able to account for her long absence. He had never heard the name, but he promised to inquire as he moved about the country, and to satisfy me when we met at Whitsunday.

I had to leave him, for the Mill was in sight. It had been delayed, and I found there had been doubt whether it could have got so far. The coals were bad and would not burn; it was useless trying to go further with them The flagsman

whom I was to relieve rode in to the village on his bicycle, and ere long a cart arrived with a load. The fires were drawn and, at my suggestion, were carried to my gipsy friend; the fresh coal was kindled. It took a while to get steam up, and when we did start the mill-men drove their hardest. My duty was to keep, say, twenty yards ahead and, when a vehicle met or overtook us, lead the horse past if it seemed restive. Till we reached the Greenshiels Burn. I had nothing to do. At the burn the Mill stopped, a hose was let down over the bridge and a supply of water pumped up. We started once more, and as we were moving up the Lang Stracht the men drove so furiously that I was kept at a hard trot. Not far above Mr. Ralston's house the Mill ceased puffing, slowed, stopped. I looked back, for no vehicle was ahead. One of the mill-men pointed to the rear, and glancing past I saw a yellow dogcart coming up. The evening was still clear, and I could have seen with a far fainter light. The eye had passed the message to the heart: Miss Maymie!

Though I recognised her at once and knew it was no dream, I was helpless. She so near when I understood her to be hundreds of miles away! The wonder! The joy! I knew the dogcart; it was from the Royal Hotel in Craigkenneth. Miss Maymie held the reins, her father was at her side, a post-boy sat behind. The horse had been brought to a walking pace and was now close to the Mill; yet I had not stirred.

"Hurry up, man, and tak' the horse by the heid," one of

the mill-men called.

And now had come the chance so long, so often dreamt of —had come when I should have called it impossible. A thousand and a thousand times I had pictured her in danger and myself arriving at the fit moment. It had come. Should I prove equal to my fortune? Nerved as though a myriad eyes were on me, I walked forward. My hand was raised when the admiral called, "Don't trouble. You'll manage, dear?" I checked myself an instant; Miss Maymie answered not, and the next moment my hand was on the rein. Carefully, firmly, I held the horse's head as I led him by, eyeing the Mill as a monster from whose first threatening movement my queen must be protected with my life. Though I knew nothing of it at the time, I can swear I did not hirple while I marched on. And when all danger was past and I had to stand and release my hold, I found courage—how I cannot tell—to

look into Miss Maymie's eyes for thanks. Her father gave me a quick nod, but she—what had she to give? Her eyes were fixed on mine and I could swear she blushed. Smiling through her blushes she said, "Thank you so much," and bowed so gracefully, so graciously! Idle to tell me all this was but common politeness. I knew that every sign, every syllable, was rich with meaning. These were the first words ever spoken to me by the bright voice of Miss Maymie.

When the trap drove on, I waited and gazed till I had to

jump or the Mill would have run me down.

That night as I lay in the barn-loft with Ranger beside me, I lived over the thrilling experience a thousand times. Yes, this was a real meeting, our first real meeting, a strange fulfilment of all my dreams. She in danger, I the protector! "Thank you so much!" I repeated the words to myself, I repeated them to Ranger till the dog, charmed with the fond tones, licked my face so insistently that I had to keep silence. Then, after I had allowed the scene to pass through my memory times unnumbered, I set myself to go through it deliberately from the moment the mill-men had called me to the moment the yellow dogcart drove away. Had I failed in anything? Was there any chance I had missed? It seemed not. Indeed, I was surprised at my own courage and resource. In spite of the admiral's prohibition I had taken my mistress under my care when her silence sanctioned, I had well fulfilled my office of protector, and had not been afraid to meet her eyes at last and accept my reward. "Thank you so much!" Yes, Miss Maymie's words confirmed the witness of my own heart: I had made the most of the glorious chance: I had played the man.

And now that we had really met as protector and protected, what would follow? Things would not, could not, be as before. How should we behave at our next meeting? I, of course, would not look as if I had any claim on her regard, but she—she would look at me with a new tenderness, and shyly, yet resolutely, would make advances to dearer intimacy. And I would understand her, would go out to meet her. And all our loving interviews pictured themselves in my imagination more readily, more vividly, than memory could have revived the actual past. Ah, blessed bird that had saved me from death! Well was it that I lived; life had something for me yet.

Not for weeks had I risen so blithely as I did the next morning. Miss Maymie was near, Miss Maymie and I were friends. The workers at the Big Mill were talking of the admiral's visit, which was understood to be on business. How long he would stay nobody was sure. Never had I found work pleasanter than I did that forenoon. I was tramping straw in the barn. As the great bunches were flung off the trusser, they were carried into the straw-barn and built up by a ploughman from a neighbouring farm. I came after him and trod them down. In the middle of the forenoon the whistle shrilled, work stopped, old Nicol and his sister, the one with a bottle of whisky and a glass, the other with a basket of bread and cheese, went through the workers, dealing to both women and men the one refreshment. When we resumed work I was put to a new task. The barn was full, and the rest of the straw had to be built in a stack outside. No tramping was needed, and I was sent up a stack to fork on to the cart.

"See that he tak's twa sheaves," Big Pate called; "we'll hae nae hunker-slidin' here."

The first cartful I managed easily enough: the sheaves, once on the fork, had only to be dropped to the cart below. As the stack sank the work got harder, for the sheaves had now to be raised. By the time the second cart was filled I had reached the limit of my strength, and durst not ask myself what would come next. It happened that we had a good interval ere the third cart came round; there had been an accident. An old body, Jess Finlayson, was on the top of the Mill cutting the bands. Another woman received the sheaves, held them till the bands were cut, then passed them to one of the mill-men, who shook them out and fed. Old Tess was fond of whisky, and Nicol, for a joke, had given her a double glass. The drink excited her, and once, as her neighbour was holding the sheaf, Jess drew a reckless stroke with her knife and slashed the young woman's left arm near the wrist. Work was stopped for a time. The rest was grateful, yet, whenever I thought of what was before me, my heart sank. The dreaded moment came. Substitutes were found for Jess and her injured neighbour, the humming of the Mill began afresh, Wull Gentles' cart came into the stackyard and drew up alongside me. My fears came true: that old pain low down in my right side began to gnaw and soon was almost unbearable. At every lift I felt that something would give way. Gentles remarked my struggles and told me to take one sheaf at a time. I was too frightened for Big Pate.

"Weel, let me fork and you can build."

Again I refused.

The next stack I was sent up was mashlum. The sheaves were very heavy, and as the man on the neighbouring stack was forking one at a time I could do the same. Again, however, it was a terrible strain when the stack wore low and I had to raise the great sheaves to the full height of the fork. We had a long spell of work, too, for Nicol wanted the threshing over before we knocked off for dinner. It was near two when we stopped, and as we were entering the kitchen I heard one of the women who had been on the top of the Mill remark that the admiral and Miss Maymie were off again: she had noticed the trap go down the Lang Stracht. A ploughman from the Home Farm corrected her: he knew for a fact that Miss Maymie alone was leaving; the admiral meant to stay a week. The news was no comfort to me.

As I lay in bed that night, wakeful with pain and sorrowful thoughts, I heard steps cross the court and I knew the mistress was visiting the byre. He Jersey was near the

calving.

"Are ye positive her time's no up?" I heard Florrie ask her the next morning, and old Phemie replied in a positive enough tone,

"She's but seven months gane. I was lookin' the book

yestreen."

That evening it was plain that Sweetheart's time was near. She kept twitching her tail and shifting her weight from side to side. That night again, though my side was less painful and I had some sleep, I heard the mistress cross the court more than once. When I entered the byre in the morning, the event was over. Sweetheart was lying with a chaff-sheet tied round her; in a disused stall at the far end of the byre was her calf. Old Nicol stood by it.

"God's sake! Was there ever sic an object?" he said;

and he set it on its feet and held it upright.

His wonder was not without cause. The creature was a bull-calf, in colour like a roe-deer. But the astonishing thing was its size. It was no bigger than any of the greyhound pups I had seen at Lowis. The spindly legs wobbled beneath

its body, diminutive as its body was; the head was of the common size, and would help to dwarf the body still more.

"Let it dee," said Nicol to his sister, who had finished milking and had come over to him; "it'll be a mere waste o' milk feedin' 't."

"I'll let it dee nane. Mony a waur-lookin' cratur has thriven and brocht a guid price frae the flesher."

"I tell ye I'll no hae guid milk wasted on sic an object."

Old Phemie never lost her temper except when her brother interfered in the duties she looked on as her own. She fired up now and the pair had a hot quarrel, in which Nicol charged his sister with robbing him, and she threatened to sue him for wages for all the years she had been his housekeeper. Nicol's sarcasms so infuriated the old lady at last that she rushed on

him with fingers bent. The farmer turned and ran.

That day we were fencing. Big Pate, Bob, and I took Durham with a cartful of stobs, props, and tools, and went over to the Laigh Park, where the fences were in worst repair. The men left me to watch the horse and entered the planting. I knew their errand. At places the fence needed posts to strengthen it and these could be got most easily by sawing down a tree. Ere long Bob returned for the cross-cut and the hand-saw, and bade me keep a look-out in case a keeper appeared. The wind was high and keen, and though I kept under lee of Durham I was cold. Tired of standing, I ventured into the planting and watched the men from a distance. They were working on a fine straight young oak and were nearly through the trunk. When they stopped sawing, Pate struck it some heavy blows with the stob-mallet, and it came down gradually and almost noiselessly, the neighbouring trees catching the branches and breaking the fall. The men proceeded to saw the trunk into lengths of seven feet or so. I had to come out and resume my watch; if the admiral knew that old Nicol was making free with his timber there would be an uproar. The cold was still keen, and I had to move about to keep myself from stiffening. At last I saw the men making through the wood with a post on their shoulders. They pitched it into the field.

"Hae ye ta'en oot the lowse stabs?" Pate demanded.

" No."

<sup>&</sup>quot;I thocht ye'd been glad o' some wark to keep ye warm," he growled, "but it seems I'll need to gie ye something to

warm ye;" and he cuffed me with his huge hand, then

kicked me about like a football.

In spite of the specific I did feel cold; the recent blistering had, maybe, made my body tender. The wind grew stronger and keener, and even Bob complained, though he had the work of driving in the stobs. When loosing-time came and I went into the boiler-house to sort Prince, I noticed something lying on the floor. It was of a ghastly bluish colour. At first I was startled; only after some seconds had I nerve to approach and examine it. Seemingly it was the body of some diminutive four-legged animal, newly flayed. The legs were too long for a cat's; they were longer even, in proportion to the body, than a dog's. Soon I understood: it would be Sweetheart's calf. Florrie was over in the bothy after supper making the beds, and I heard her tell the men that the calf had died that afternoon. There had been another quarrel between the master and the mistress. Nicol wanted the creature buried as it was, the mistress insisted on having it skinned. Neither the farmer nor Florrie would help, and the old lady did the task herself.

"And that minds me"—and Florrie turned to me—"that you're to tak' it ower to the midden and bury it. Ye'll

manage it weel eneuch in the dark."

As I went into the byre for a graip, the farmer and his sister were standing by Sweetheart. Anxiety had made them friends again. The cow was very ill; she lay on one side and, though in evident pain, could not turn. Her breathing was oppressed. Nicol and the mistress were consulting as to whether the veterinary should be called. The expense

was the one objection with both.

"He could look at Roy's leg when he's oot, onyway," Phemie suggested; "ye were sayin' it's no just richt yet." Nicol made no answer, and she took his consent for granted. "Haste ye, Jamie, and get the bit cauf put awa'. Then ye'll yoke Prince in the dowg-cairt and drive in to Saul's—ye ken whaur he stays—and bring him oot wi' ye. And if Saul's no in, and no like to be, gang to Fraser's; that's in Queen Street—isn't it, Nicol? Ay, Queen Street. D'ye hear?"

Saul was at home and came back with me. Sweetheart was worse. Big Pate and Bob followed Saul into the byre. Farm-hands have a thirst for veterinary knowledge.

"Is 't inflammation, wad ye say?" asked the mistress, when Saul had examined the cow.

Saul was an elderly man, tall and stout, with a gross red, shaven face. He was a loud talker and had an outlandish accent. I heard somewhere that he hailed from the North

of England.

"We'se gie her every chance. She's a fine beast, and 'twad be pity if owt gaed wrang. Ye see, Measter Gow, if fowk gie up hope, they do nowt; but if they dinna lose hope, they try a' wayses," and so he went on, but never answered

a question or imparted the least information.

He left a bottle which he had brought with him on learning from me the symptoms of Sweetheart's illness. He also directed that a big bottle of treacle and hot water should be given every three hours. Above all, the cow must be kept warm; hot cloths must be kept on her body and sacks laid over these. Somebody must stay with her constantly to see that the sacks did not slip off.

"T' lad 'll do first-reate," he concluded.

I did not object, and on coming home, after taking the veterinary back to Craigkenneth, I repaired to the byre for my orders. The cold had grown bitterer with every hour, and the warm byre was more attractive than my usual sleeping-place. But the mistress did not need me; she would

watch the precious beast herself.

The next day we were again fencing, and in the same park though at the opposite side. The cold was fiercer than ever. While the two men were making free with another of the admiral's young oaks, and I was on the lookout, I heard a great yelping, and soon a rabbit came tearing up the field with Ranger close behind. Not far from where I stood the rabbit took refuge in the dyke. Ranger kept yelping and jumping about the spot. I had reached it almost as soon as he, and I began pulling down the stones. Soon I could distinguish the brown fur, and cautiously enlarging the hole I pulled the fugitive out. Ranger, delighted with my help, kept yelping and springing, but without the loss of a moment I let the rabbit free and flung myself on the dog. Though he did not try to bite, he struggled furiously and I had my work to hold him. Only when the rabbit had disappeared at a bend of the wood did I let Ranger go. As I turned round, I saw the two men close to the dyke watching me.

Pate's face at that moment showed a ferocity of hate beyond anything I had ever witnessed. There was some reason. The men often nicked a rabbit, and that openly. Nicol quite approved; even the keepers were indifferent so long as the rabbits were not meant for sale. I knew all this, and it was spite against my tyrant, not pity for the rabbit, that made me act as I did. I wanted to do Pate out of a free meal.

He must have understood, for he did not once speak while he seized me, pitched and kicked me about, and at last felled me on the turf. In spite of renewed blows and kicks and hideous threats I lay still, and the men had to work a while

by themselves ere I could join them.

I did not need such punishment; the cold that day was cruel enough. The wind—a nor'-easter—was so high that I could scarcely keep my feet, and so keen that it pierced to my heart. At times we had to stop and shelter behind Durham. The horse himself would have collapsed if he had not been covered with a heavy rug. The men could warm themselves by work: they took turn about at the stobmallet; my duties—to carry the nail-can, hand the stobs, hold the stenter—were not heavy enough to keep me in heat. Twice that day, about eleven in the forenoon and again when we had worked an hour or so after dinner, I had a feeling that my power of endurance was going: another touch and my heart would stop.

## CHAPTER XII

T supper Florrie said,

"Ye're to sit up wi' the coo the nicht. The mistress is tired oot. Gang into the byre and she'll tell ye hersel'."

I went out, declining, as usual, to answer. The mistress was sitting on the milking-stool, her head against the hash-chest, her eyes shut, her mouth open. She snored loudly. Sweetheart lay on her left side, giving quick deep pants which had shifted the sacks and left her body bare. I arranged the coverings, and squatting in the stall waited for the mistress to waken. Then, growing impatient, I went over and shook her. She woke, looking confused and guilty. She must have an hour or two's rest, she said; she had not been in bed for two nights and two days. Saul had been up again in the afternoon and left a big powder—she was sure there was saltpetre in it and ginger, whatever more—to be dissolved and given in an hour's time. Then I must continue with the treacle and hot water, a bottle every three hours.

"So ye'll just sit doon," she concluded. "The men'll look to the horse themsel's. And ye'll no need to wait up lang.

me or Florrie 'll relieve ye."

The warmth of the byre was welcome after the terrible cold outside, and my corner of the stall, well lined with straw, seemed a snug resting-place. But my body was covered with raw bruises and, shift as I liked, I galled some sore. Old Nicol came in at night to show me how to administer the treacle.

"But hoo am I to ken the time?" I asked.

He had not thought of that. I might guess. But no; that would be risky. Or he might leave his watch with me. No; I might break it. This was the plan—he would send over the alarm; it could stand on the hash-chest.

"And ye'll mind this," he concluded; "if Sweetheart rises, ye maun rin ower to the kitchen directly and let them ken. The mistress 'll sleep wi' Florrie for the nicht, and the kitchen door 'll be left open. So ye'll rin ower if the coo gets up, or if ye observe ony change."

On the hash-chest beside the alarm stood a stable-lantern, and as it was almost opposite Sweetheart's stall I could see the cow distinctly. Her flanks heaved with her short deep gasps; her ears were pointed back—a bad sign, even in my inexperienced eyes. I pitied her. She had been so gentle and tractable that she was everybody's favourite, and now as I watched her fighting for her life I came to have the feeling that she was human, that she understood her situation as I might have done myself. Then came gloomier thoughts. There was a likeness between Sweetheart and myself; for me, too, the end might not be far away. Ay, the end must be near, though I could not tell how it might come. Should I die under some savage kick or blow? Or just waste away as I was wasting now? Sweetheart was luckier than I: she was prized, anxiously tended, had nurses by night and by day, and there would be mourning when she died. When the end came for me, few would know and none would care. Miss Maymie? Ah! It was one of my black hours, and I told myself she would not even know. She lived in her own world, far, far away from her unknown worshipper. This is the last thought I remember; here I must have been mastered by sleep.

I woke in a fright. I had been sleeping and things might have gone wrong. A glance at the clock reassured me; it was not yet midnight. Still, I must not sleep again, and while I crouched in the straw, thinking of Miss Maymie and my own sufferings, I tried to keep my senses alert, and I stirred whenever my eyes grew heavy. I had given one dose of treacle, which the cow swallowed with little trouble, and, in spite of my resolves and efforts, I was yielding to drowsiness. They could not blame me, was my thought; the women should

have come as they promised.

It was about one o'clock when something happened. Sweetheart, who had lain all night on the one side, panting ceaselessly but never moving, suddenly stirred, and almost ere I was aware struggled to her feet. The movement affected me with joy as well as surprise: the poor beast was to live. My orders had been to rouse the kitchen if any such change took place, but there was something to be done first. Sweetheart had been left unchained for fear of being choked, but as I saw how unsteadily she was standing I felt some support was needed. Behind the hash-chest was a hank of tarry rope; I reeved it through the spars of the hack and fastened Sweetheart by the horns.

Then I hurried to the kitchen. For all my haste and

anxiety I felt the cruel cold as I crossed the yard.

"Mistress! Mistress!" I called on entering the kitchen.

No answer.

I called again, standing by the bed where the sleepers were snoring. Still no answer, so I shook the nearest one. It turned out to be Florrie; the kitchen lamp hung so low that I had not been able to distinguish. She started at my touch: I started also, and, scrupulously avoiding contact with her, I leant over and roused her neighbour. Old Phemie said, "A' richt," adding with a long yawn that she would be in a minute. When I reached the byre, Sweetheart was still upright and, though panting as when she lay, was wonderfully steady. I felt she was saved. For a time I employed myself keeping the sacks on her back for fear of cold, but when many minutes had passed without bringing the mistress I concluded she had fallen asleep, and I repaired to the kitchen once more. Both women were sleeping heavily and I had again some trouble in wakening them. This time, however, I made old Phemie understand that not an instant must be lost, and as she was now thoroughly awake I left satisfied. Sweetheart still kept her feet, though she was shaky. The pile of sacks was a crushing load, yet I durst not take any off; if she caught cold, I should be blamed. After shifting her feet a while she began to stagger, and it needed all my strength to hold her up. Still no one from the kitchen. The cow's legs were now giving way; she was rocking so that I could not support her. If only help would come! For I durst not leave the byre. Sweetheart had now slipped so far back that the rope was taut; it and my arms were alone keeping her up. The worst was that from the time the rope tightened she used the little strength left her to drag her head from it, her best stay. She tugged and strained outwards, the rope broke, and Sweetheart, with nothing now to resist her-for I had to slip aside to avoid being crushed—staggered back out of the stall. When her feet caught on the grip, she crashed down on the brick floor. My heart sank, yet I did not

suspect the worst.

The other cows were now excited; some had risen. One. the cow to the right of Sweetheart, was a black beast, strong and wild. Sweetheart was now lying close behind her, and Sootie, kicking out fiercely with her hind hoofs, struck her on the brow. The dull thud filled me with terror. The Jersey's head lay in the grip, else she might have been able to draw it away. Though I narrowly escaped being kicked to death, I tried again and again to shift it, but the weight of her body always dragged it to the old place. The kicks, savage though they were, had not affected her much; her panting continued just as before. I stood in terrible perplexity. Should I run over to the kitchen for help, or do my best alone? After a pause Sootie struck out more wildly than at first, and every stroke caught Sweetheart's brow. Again I tried to shift her head and failed. But as I was rising I grew aware of a change in the poor sufferer; her panting got quicker but much lighter, then it stopped; the head fell back a little on the edge of the grip; it felt quite limp. Sweetheart was gone! Once more Sootie kicked out, and the terrible deathly thuds, sounding on the poor brow, affected me as much as if the victim had been alive. Strange, unnatural it seemed to me, that a creature should treat one of its kind so cruelly; the cruelty should come from another race, from man. Again I tried to shift the head and, whether that there was no resistance now or that I was desperate, I succeeded. Then I hastened to the kitchen. The women were asleep once more.
"Mistress! Mistress!" I called so sharply that both
women answered at once; "are ye no gaun to rise?"

Old Phemie was soon on end.

"I had faun ower, I doot; I'll be up the noo." "Ye can get up but ye're owre lang aboot it."

" Is there onything wrang?"

"Ay, faur wrang. If ye had come when I ca'd ye, it micht ha' been different;" and without more words I left her.

This time she was roused in earnest. Ere I had been many minutes in the byre, she joined me. I had removed the rope from the hack and from Sweetheart's horns, fearing some fault might be found.

"She's deid, she's deid," said the mistress, with a long sigh.

This was all the moan she made. Perhaps she was not sufficiently awake yet to feel the loss. "Hoo did she get on to the floor?" she asked in a little.

"She got up, and it was then I cam' ower for ye. This

is the third time I've ca'd ye."

"Ay, I ken. I was fair worn oot for want o' sleep. But it wad ha' made nae difference; naething could ha' been dune."

While she was examining the cow's body, I told her as much of the story as I thought safe: how Sweetheart had risen, how on my return from the kitchen the first time she was still on her feet, but had afterwards staggered out to the floor and fallen. About Sootie's part in the tragedy I said nothing.

"If ye had come even when I ca'd ye the second time, she

micht ha' been leevin' yet," I concluded.

"Na, na," said the mistress, who had now finished her scrutiny; "it's been strong inflammation; we could ha' dune naething. Ay, I'm vexed to lose her; she was a steady milker and a canny beast, as quaet's a lamb. Weel, weel, it's by noo. And Jamie, ye needna say onything aboot me or Florrie no risin'; it micht get Florrie into a row. And ye can slip awa' to yer bed noo, Jamie; ye'll be needin' 't."

"I'll better lie here for a' the time," I suggested. My visits to the kitchen had taught me that the cold was fiercer than ever, and I did not care to exchange the warm byre for the barn-loft. I lay down in Sweetheart's empty stall,

gathered the straw about me, and was asleep at once.

I woke with a cry of pain and the next moment I was on my feet. Big Pate had roused me with a kick, and was quickening my senses by cuffs on the face and head.

"D'ye mean to sleep a' day?" he demanded with oaths.

"Will ither folk hae to yoke for ye?"

I became aware that the milking was over. All the men were in the byre. Sweetheart's death and the preparations for removing the body would be the excuse for disturbing them. Big Pate was in a savage temper.

"I believe the beggar's been sleepin' a' nicht. What

way did ye no ca' somebody when the coo got up?"

I looked to the mistress, who said,

"He did ca' us, Pate, ou ay. And I cam' ower. But naething could be dune; it was strong inflammation, ye see. Noo, haste ye, Jamie, and yoke. But tell him aboot the knacker, Nicol."

The master gave me my instructions. After I delivered the milk, I was to go to the knackery in Drummond Road and leave word for Filshie to send out a cart at once and have the beast removed.

The wind was so bitter that though I had provided myself with sacks I was almost helpless by the time I reached Craigkenneth. My hands could hardly feel the milk-cans at the dairy. I hirpled alongside the cart to Drummond Road. This was a street on the outskirts of the town, not fully built on as yet; part of the ground was occupied with wooden sheds. The dairy people had told me that Filshie's stables were on the right hand and well along; but this was little help. The buildings had nothing to distinguish them. Nobody was astir, no window was lighted. I walked along beside Prince, and was near the very last buildings of the town when I heard voices, and soon I made out two persons advancing on the footpath. I waited till they should come within the light of the cart-lamp, but ere I could speak they stopped and took the word:

"Where does this road go to?"

The question astonished me, and the appearance of the new-comers had already excited my interest. They were a young couple, both very tall and, as I now saw, fresh-cheeked and good-looking—as comely a pair as one could meet. They were well dressed and carried a big bundle apiece.

In answer to the man's question I said the road led to

Craigkenneth.

He did not speak at once. At last he asked, "This'll be Craigkenneth we're coming to?"

I told him it was. By this time I had remarked that he spoke with a slight brogue.

"And where does the road lead to after that?"

I was confused at the question. When I gathered my wits I told him it went through the village of Lucas, and I named the first town beyond.

He made no answer and I began my questions. Was there a light in any of the buildings they had passed? I was

looking for stables—a knackery—Filshie's.

The young woman replied, speaking very correctly and purely. They had seen no light, but that building—indicating one they had just passed—looked like stables.

I mentioned that Filshie's was on the other side.

She couldn't tell, then. "But there's someone coming," she added; and I could hear distant footsteps, and soon made out a figure passing a lamp-post. We all waited the stranger's approach, but ere he had moved far he stopped, and after a few seconds' halt turned slowly up a lane between two buildings. I put round Prince's head and walked on with my new acquaintances, the three of us talking about the terrible cold. At the lane-mouth nobody was visible, and the pair, after lingering a moment, moved on, remarking that it was too cold to stand. I did not care to lose my chance and I waited.

Soon the steps were heard up the lane, now nearer, now further away. The person was evidently sauntering back and forward—a watchman perhaps. I left the pony and went up. The lane was very dark; the wind, pent between the buildings, was so furious that I could scarcely battle against it. When the footsteps sounded near, though I could hardly see the figure, I asked for Filshie's knackery. No answer. I came nearer and repeated the question. Still no word. I repeated it louder, thinking the wind might have drowned my voice. Still the person kept silence, but he proceeded down the lane. I followed him, wondering. When we were near the cart-lamp I could see he was a young man, slightly built, thin-faced, with some scanty reddish hair about his lips. His clothing was poor. Once more I asked the way to Filshie's knackery. He stood silent, but moved his right hand quickly to his mouth and ears. This he did again and again. At last I understood: he was deaf and dumb. I shrank in horror and even when I got to Prince's head I glanced back fearfully lest he should be following.

Some distance on I met a labourer bound for his work, his piece under his arm, a flask in his pocket. He told me I was past the knackery, and he indicated its whereabouts. At the same time he would recommend me to go to Burns Street, where Filshie had his main stables. A man was on duty there all night. I knew the street, and after the navvy's direction I soon found the building; it was the only one, except a dwelling-house, that had a light. I gave my message, got into the milk-cart, and gathering the sacks about me,

started for home.

The wind, which had gathered strength and keenness every hour, was now in my teeth. Soon I had to get down from the seat and snuggle on the floor of the cart for shelter. Still the cold cut me through. My spirits, too, flagged; awful darkness settled on me; such a horror of gloom as I had not known since the day I stood by the Maiden's Rest. Weird fancies oppressed me about the people I had encountered that morning. The young couple. well-dressed, tramping at that hour, asking if this was Craigkenneth they were entering, asking where the road led to after that—queer, queer. young fellow who spoke no word in answer to my repeated questions, who pointed with his fingers to his ears and open mouth—I shuddered with horror. Yes, I was marked out for mischances above others. All I had suffered, all I was likely to suffer, rose to view. Big Pate's blows and kicks and floggings-I bore their marks in weals and gashes; and fresh torture, worse torture would come. One of these days a savage blow would split my skull and make me an idiot for life, or a kick would break my back or leg and leave me a hunchback or a cripple. And I could not run away, all Pate's cruelty could not drive me away; I was chained. So the only escape was death, and once more death began to draw me. The truth is, I suppose, the horror of gloom that engulfed me had its rise in my bodily weakness: the cold was chilling my life-blood. I was now clear of the town, and was feeling as I had felt more than once the day before-another touch and I should sink. At first I had thought of getting out of the cart and walking or running alongside to revive myself. Now I was past that; the effort to move was not to be dreamed of.

In Whistleton smithy there was a light and the ring of an anvil; it may have been these signs of human activity that changed my thoughts: they turned to Miss Maymie. And it was strange. Always before, when I was dreaming of my queen, the dream would not flow on if I was in pain or any bodily discomfort. She came to me now, and never surely had I been in worse state—bruised in every limb, chilled by the merciless cold till my next heart's throb might be the last. She came to me now, and my dream flowed like a gliding river. We walked together in the park; the air was sunny, the grass was freshest green. We smiled into each other's eyes, and there was a new light in the eyes of both. For at last, at last! I had found courage to tell her of my long worship, and she—she had owned that long she had loved me back.

Then we confessed the sweet longings, the hopes, the apprehensions that had haunted our hearts while yet we loved in secret. And at length I grew bold and confided the doubt that used to torture me most. I was so weak, so mean, and she so high in place, so rich in Nature's gifts as well, that I sometimes feared—oh, maddening doubt!—I could be nothing in her eyes. And the sweet voice—with the bird-like chuckle in it still for all its earnestness—made answer,

"You were the world to me from the first. For I knew you would become so great and noble that I should count it a glory to be your worshipper. You will—you will be . . . "

Sainting. I could recall that at Whitellown Souther Miss

## CHAPTER XIII

THERE was I? The place was strange, very different from the dark scene I had last known. Perhaps I was dead: I might have died under the grip of the awful cold and now I would be on the other side. Yet the place, though quite strange, was not like anything fancy had pictured in the world of the dead. I saw a wall-paper of a light sprig-pattern, bed-clothes that seemed to be covering me, a curtained window, a table with a big looking-glass on it, some chairs, and-lighting and warming the whole—a soft rich glow. A certain uneasiness soon made itself felt, then grew to pain. Yes, I was awake; the pain that had wakened me came from the weals and scars on my body. I was awake, but in some strange place. Where? No guess could help me. I must trace my movements as far as memory could guide. I had been to Craigkenneth with the milk and had left a message for Filshie, the knacker. the way home I had felt the cold terribly and had seemed like fainting. I could recall that at Whistleton smithy Miss Maymie's image had risen, and I could even remember the scene my fancy had set her in. We were walking in the park and had confessed our love. That day-dream must have passed into a dream of sleep, for other faces had appeared, faces of some who had looked kindly on me at some former time. After that I knew nothing till I woke in this lighted room. The strain of recalling these past moments may have exhausted me. I fell asleep.

When I woke again I knew there was someone near, though I was so drowsy, or rather so weak, that I could not trouble to open my eyes. When I did look up I got a start. Was something wrong with my brain? Beside me was the lady I had seen in my dream—not Miss Maymie, but one as gentle

if not as fair. She spoke;

"Do you know me, my wee man?"

But I was so bewildered that I kept looking and gave no answer by word or sign. She watched me a while, then

moved away.

Later-how long after I could not tell-she came back, though only to show a gentleman in. The new-comer, with his erect figure and long grey moustache, looked an old army man. I knew him at once for the local doctor. He turned down the bed-clothes, felt the cloths and rubber bottles that lay close to my body.

"How did you get these sores?" he asked.

I hesitated.

"Speak out; don't be frightened with me. I'm told it might be the ploughman at the Mailing that has been abusing you. Is that so?"

" Yes."

" Mackinlay?"

"Yes."

"Do they pain you much?"

"They're not very bad just now."
He gave a "hem," and was about to leave when I asked,

"Please, Doctor Finlay, where am I?"

"Oh ay. Why, you're at Cambuslochan-Mr. Ralston's."

"Was 't Mr. Ralston that found me?"

"Well, it was his man, at any rate. What's the last thing you remember?"

I told him about passing Whistleton smithy and feeling like

to faint under the cold.

"Ah, well, it did floor you in more ways than one! Mr. Ralston's man found your horse making up the Lang Stracht without a driver, and when he stopped it he found you senseless on the floor of the cart. He brought you up to the house, and the worthy folk have been working all day to bring you

"Is 't not morning yet?" I inquired.

"It is not, sir; it's eight o'clock at night, and this is the second visit I've paid you. So get well as fast as you can, and don't have me coming much oftener."

He was again making for the door when I stopped him with

another question,

"Is Prince all right?" "Who's Prince, pray?" "The pony."

"Oh, I see. Well, I heard nothing about him; but I'll

send Mr. Ralston in for a minute, and he'll satisfy you."

It did me good to see my friend's frank, kindly face. He told me his man had taken Prince up in the morning, and that old Mr. Gow had called later to ask for me.

Next day, while his young wife was feeding me with beeftea from an invalid jug, Mr. Ralston mentioned that a visitor had inquired for me that morning. Could I guess who it was?

I guessed old Nicol.

He laughed.

"A much greater man than your old uncle, Jamie." And when I was at a loss, he informed me it was the admiral. "You were sleeping, so we didn't waken you. But he means to call to-morrow and have a talk with you; he goes off to-morrow for the south."

How had the admiral heard about me? Why was he showing an interest in me? I made many a wild conjecture. And I had time; for a soft, deep cough had started and kept me awake. When Mrs. Ralston came into the room the next forenoon to tell me that the admiral had called, I was certainly feeling ill enough, and my appearance must have told my state, for after my visitor had asked how I did he answered the question himself,

"You're not looking very bright, my poor lad."

Seating himself at the bedside, he questioned me in his sharp, jerky way about the ill-usage I had suffered at the Mailing. He made me show him my bruised legs, and at the sight he grew indignant. He had already spoken both to Mr. Gow and Mackinlay, he told me. Mr. Gow had professed to know

nothing, Mackinlay had denied everything.

"I'll speak to them again this very day and I'll speak to them in a way they won't forget. I couldn't have believed that such things were done on my property. It's a disgrace, a scandal. Meiklejohn must take an oversight of the farms, and see that the young people are well treated. I'll tell him at once. It's simply astounding that this could have gone on so long—since Martinmas, isn't it?—at our very doors. I should have been told of it months ago. Hard to tell how long it might have gone on if your friends hadn't, in their peculiar way, forced it on my notice."

He would remark my astonished look for, without saying

more, he took a small pocket-book from his breast-pocket, selected a letter, and removing it from the envelope, handed both to me. The exertion of raising myself in the bed brought on a coughing-fit, and for all my curiosity and excitement it was some time ere I could begin the reading. The envelope was addressed to Admiral Seton, and had the Lucas postmark. The letter ran:

"HONOURED SIR,

"I take the pen in hand to tell you that a boy in this place will soon be murdered if you do not save him, and his name is James Bryce, serving with Gow at the Mailing Farm. The first ploughman, Pate Mackinlay, kicks him every day and leathers him with a halter, and he is black and blue under the clothes, as witnesses can certify. Pate wants to drive him away because he thinks Mr. Gow may make him his heir. And he is lying at death's door at Mr. Ralston's, Cambuslochan. Oh, honoured sir, he has no one to help him but you, and he has no father or mother. So if you will save him, the blessing of the orphan and the fatherless will be upon you.

"Honoured sir, please excuse the great liberty of writing you. You being the laird and not needing to care for anyone

and so can help him."

As I lay back, looking at the letter, the admiral said,

"I didn't know what to make of it at first. However, I looked in at the Mailing and questioned Mr. Gow and Mackinlay, and I must say I never liked Mackinlay's looks; he seemed a fellow fit for anything. Still, I couldn't have taken the story on anybody's word. If I hadn't seen the state of your body with my own eyes, I should have said the thing was impossible. Why, it could hardly have been expected among savages, and here, among an intelligent educated people and on my own property—"

His indignation made him forget, if he ever thought of it, to ask if I knew who had written the message that brought him to my aid. I did know the writer, the writers rather, for they were two. Some things in the letter were known only to Dannie Martin, and the hand was the hand of little Teen.

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PART II
The Mansion

PART II.

## CHAPTER XIV

HEN I was beginning to crawl about, the Seton factor, who had visited me shortly after the admiral, called a second time. He told me, none to my surprise, that old Nicol did not want

me back till I was fit for work.

"However," Mr. Meiklejohn continued, "Admiral Seton left word that I was to take charge of you. So I've arranged with Mrs. Dawson—you know Jean Dawson—that you'll stop with her in the mean time. Mr. and Mrs. Ralston have been uncommonly kind, and we mustn't give them any more trouble."

"Jamie's no trouble at all," the young lady said, "and I

don't think he's strong enough yet to be moved."

"That'll only be a ten minutes' business," said the factor, and when everything is arranged we'd better have no delay. So to-morrow, or the first fine day, I'll send the trap down."

"I'm of the same opinion as my wife," Mr. Ralston said.
"It's rather soon to remove Jamie, if he has to be removed

at all. He's in nobody's way here."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Ralston. Still, he would need to leave some time, and when everything's ready he had

better leave now. You've done-"

"I feel, anyway," Mr. Ralston interrupted, "that Jamie should be left to decide for himself. Do you want to leave us already, Jamie? I don't think you're very anxious;" and he smiled kindly.

"You don't feel it would do you any harm to have a drive

up the Stracht?" Meiklejohn asked, smiling also.

I answered nothing. To leave my friends would be no pain; to stay and burden them would be no shame. The heart had been taken out of me by my illness; I was ready to let people do with me as they pleased.

The factor gave his own meaning to my silence.

"That's all right, then, James. If it's dry to-morrow, Harry 'll drive down for you. See that you're fine and strong;" and along with my two friends he sauntered out

of the stackyard, where they had found me resting.

One reason I was quartered on the Dawsons was, I suppose, that they were the only couple on the estate who were childless and could make room for a lodger in their but-and-ben. And Jean was a favourite with the higher powers. She deluged them with flattery, and in return got scraps from their table. Everything about the woman-her thin, small, restless figure, her white, wizened face, her shrill voice, her false wheedling address, above all, her slovenly ways, would have sickened me had I not been past caring for anything. Her husband was a labourer on the estate. Toil abroad and tyranny within doors had robbed him of what spirit had ever been his, and his voice was seldom heard except on Saturday nights, when he came home from Craigkenneth with sixpennyworth of raw whisky in his stomach. Often, while I lay wakeful at nights, did I hear Jean discoursing to him of my state. "He canna last lang noo; that hoast o' his would finish a stoot man, and he eats next to naething." And once, as the pair sat in the kitchen after the midday meal, she remarked, "If he's awa' within a month it'll gie us time to look oot for lodgers for the Fair week." Though there was a wall between us, my fancy could see the small frowsy black head give a jerk in my direction.

The doctor seldom visited me. He would know I was doomed, and he would not think my life worth prolonging. Mr. Meiklejohn spoke kindly when we met, but he never called at the cottage. The admiral's people were all in London. My butty, Dannie Martin, left at Whitsunday to drive a grocer's van in Fallowkirk, where his parents stayed. Little Teen left at the same time. She quarrelled with her mistress and took a fee north of Craigkenneth. So I was alone. Death did not scare me, did not interest me. I was interested in nothing, in no one, even Miss Maymie. I walked in a dream, and the world I drew my languid breath in, with its busy dwellers, its summer skies, its woods and meadows, ay, its singing birds, so dear before, was remote as the moon.

Once only was my interest wakened. An old body who peddled cheap lace, tapes, needles, and the like wares came to

the cottage door one forenoon. She seemed to be a regular caller, for Jean gave her a warm welcome, purchased from her basket and made her a cup of tea. Jean's energies went all to gossip, and her visitor had the news of the whole county. Many a name was turned over by the pair. Mrs. Seton was in poorer health than usual, and the admiral was growing anxious. How the old packwife knew the condition of the lady's body, not to say her husband's mind, she did not explain, but she spoke of both with as much assurance as though she had come post from London and brought the report from the pair themselves. This topic exhausted, she started another.

"Ay, that's anither we'll no see in this kintraside."

"Wha's that?" inquired her hostess.

"The Wanderer."

The name woke memories, and for the first time for months I listened.

"What way that? She's-she's no deid?"

"That is she," said the old woman placidly, and she went on to give the story. The Wanderer had fallen seriously ill somewhere in the neighbourhood of Glasgow, and had been taken to a hospital. She was seen to be past hope, and she had such a loathsome disease upon her that they smothered her.

I was kept awake most of that night by my cough as I had been with the pain in my side on the night when I first met with the Wanderer and found in her a friend and a nurse. She was much in my thoughts. Never, never again! Those nights when I used to leave the bole unfastened, the ladder handy, and to wait with something like expectancy for the stumbling footsteps in the stackyard, seemed years away. I felt old. Miss Maymie's gift, the little box of chocolate that I had laid aside for the poor vagrant, came to mind. Never, never again! I knew I should soon follow her. And I did not care.

Early in July, a good month before their usual time, the Setons were back. I overheard Jean tell that Mrs. Seton had felt worse and wanted home. One day towards noon, a day of fresh sweetness, I was crawling through the park when the cough attacked me so fiercely and clung to me so long that I had to lie on the grass and gasp. While I was struggling for breath I heard voices and footsteps near. Then there was

silence. I raised myself and looked round. On the loan stood Miss Maymie and her young brother, both equipped with rods and creels. She wore a grey costume and a blue cap. While I gazed she walked on, and after a little hesitation Master Reggie followed, though he looked back more than once.

An age had passed since I had seen that face, yet it had not lost its power. At the first glance I had felt my heart stop, then start its wild bounding, just as of old, just as of old. Delicious dreams began to flow in wild rhapsodies. She had stood and looked at me; she must have recognised me. I pictured her calling at the cottage on her way home and leaving a string of trout. I actually waited for her the whole afternoon, and waited in vain.

The next day I was so ill that I could not rise. When I was able to get out, I saw nothing of Miss Maymie. She may have been little out-of-doors, for her mother, I heard Tean say, was worse; an operation was thought of; a great professor was coming to examine her. One afternoon, ten days maybe after that glimpse of Miss Maymie, someone hailed Jean at the door. I recognised the admiral's voice. "Yes, Jean," he was saying as he came into the kitchen,

"I knew you'd be glad to have the news. Yes; Sir William

is quite satisfied there's nothing serious the matter."

"Eh, but I'm prood to hear that, admiral," Jean responded, more unctuously even than her wont-I actually believe she pretended to be crying; "eh, but her trouble has been a sair thocht to me. And to think that she's like to be hersel' again and nae operation needed!"

"No operation, Jean. It's a blessed thing, isn't it? Sir William believes she has a long, happy life before her yet."

The admiral was in that exalted mood when a man is ready to shake hands with a beggar on the road. His voice was high and tremulous, and threatened to break with tears of joy.

"Eh, sirs, that's as guid news as though somebody had left me a fortune. And to think that oor leddy 'll gang oot and in among us as she used to dae. I was just sayin'---" And Jean might have poured forth her oily words for hours if the admiral had not broken in:

"Yes, Jean, it's a happy day for us all, and we want to make others share in our happiness. Is your lodger at home, Jean? The lad that's ill, I mean. Yes, Jamie. Well. Sir

William here wishes to see him. It was Reggie that suggested it. When the poor things heard that their mother had nothing seriously wrong with her, Reggie asked, Wouldn't Sir William try to cure the boy with the cough? And Sir William was very kind; he consented at once. But time's precious; yours is, at any rate, Sir William; " and the admiral put his head in at my door as he was speaking. "If you'll just step in—yes, we'll leave you till you're ready. Sir William has come, James, to see if he can do anything for your cough. He has been seeing Mrs. Seton, and you'll be glad to hear that she's likely to be quite herself ere long."

The visitor had sat down. He was a rather tall man of about sixty, with a roundish florid face, chubby features, short thin beard and moustache. What hair was left on his head was black, hardly touched with grey. The spectacles he wore had large round lenses, which added to the childlike placidity of his look. While putting a question or two about my illness he was surveying me mildly; then he told me to strip. I had off my jacket and waistcoat, and was starting to the trousers when he asked—and I was aware of a change

in his tone,

"Whose is this?"

I looked and saw that to pass the minute of waiting he had carelessly picked up a scrap of paper from the table. It was scribbled with a few words in pencil.

"Whose is this?" he repeated.

I told him, and his look changed as his tone had done. After another question or two he nodded to me to continue undressing, and when I stood mother-naked he examined me from head to foot with scrupulous care. While I dressed he talked about my illness, his words flowing on like a placid brook. His students, I have heard, used to say he suffered from verbal diarrhœa.

"I suppose you were making yourself miserable, James, with the fear that you were in consumption and were spitting up your lungs? Your lungs are as sound as my own, and all that's wrong with you is bronchitis occasioned by exposure. That's bad enough certainly if it becomes chronic, and your care must be to keep it from becoming so. Whenever you have a touch of cold and are threatened with this soft cough, keep your bed and don't rise till the cough's completely gone. I'll prescribe something to relieve you at present, and you will

keep the prescription and make use of it if the cough threatens you again. But there is this I must tell you. Care and medicines will be useless if you don't do your part. You must stop brooding over your state, and must try to be cheerful. Keep outdoors whenever it is possible and take an interest in outdoor life, and in a little, if you have the chance of engaging in light work, you must put your heart into it." Then he flowed on, touching on the reason of his interest in me; but I have never repeated his words, and will not repeat them now. When he had risen and was giving his final directions for my treatment, he asked,

"Are you properly attended to here?"

By this I had gained confidence enough to give him the truth about Jean. He merely nodded as he glanced round the room. Ere he left I begged him with much shamefacedness

to say nothing about the scrap of paper.

The very next day I was removed once more. My new home was the West Lodge, occupied by the widow of the last head-gardener. I had often admired the neat little gate-house, with the golden azaleas at the south gable, the scarlet tropaeolum on the porch, and I now found that the interior was as sweet and attractive. How welcome, too, the kindly motherly ways of the old lady after the callousness of the slattern I had left!

I was not long installed when the admiral came to see that I was comfortable. What Sir William had told him I do not know; certainly it made him regard me with new interest. He asked if I was fond of reading, and on finding that I knew something about birds he promised to send along some birdbooks. Master Reggie brought them, and the boy and I were soon intimate. Reggie favoured his father in his looks, still more in his ways. The little world of Seton domains was made for him and his, though it was right that his subjects should be cared for. Such an outlook, especially in a boy of twelve, makes for cheerfulness. Reggie overflowed with life. and his pleasant companionship did as much as the professor's drugs or the change of residence to restore my health. The cough left me, I was able to spend most of the day rambling through the woods, and ere many weeks the life at the Mailing with its privations and cruel sufferings appeared like a bad dream. But a chance word gave me a painful awakening.

The factor, who never met me without passing a kindly

word, looked in at the lodge one September evening. My old uncle had been inquiring about me. Was I not strong enough to come back to my work at the Mailing? They

needed all the hands they could get for the harvest.

It was as if the pit had opened. I had been letting the sweet days go by without thought or care; could it be that the old life of helpless anguish was to be mine once more? Though I did not, indeed could not, speak, my terror must have showed in my face, for the smile with which the factor had repeated old Nicol's words changed to a look of pity.

"You don't much fancy going back there?" he asked. I hung my head in silence; if I had spoken I should have

burst out crying.

"Still, James," said Mr. Meiklejohn, "you must do something; that is, if you feel yourself pretty strong now. We can't expect to spend our life in idleness and amusement; we have to work as well as play, if we don't want to be a burden on other people. Besides, it's good for ourselves. Folks are never happier than when they're well employed."

He stopped as if expecting me to speak, and I managed

to say,

"I know, sir."

"Well, James, I've been thinking of something that might be more to your mind than the work you've left. You're a pretty good scholar, considering the chances you've had, and I could give you a start in the office; indeed, I could do with another lad nicely. How would that suit you?"

Again my looks spoke for me, and the arrangement was at once settled. Two days later I had to accompany Mrs. Paterson to Craigkenneth and be measured for new clothes. On the Monday morning at ten I reported myself at the estate

office.

This consisted of two large rooms—the inner reserved for Mr. Meiklejohn—in the old building that had once been the mansion-house. The factor pronounced me a fair writer and counter.

"You would be a great help if you knew some shorthand and typing," he said, "and we might get a chance of having you

taught."

The chance must have been easily found, for soon I went in to Craigkenneth three afternoons every week and took lessons from a commercial tutor. The hope of being useful, the

delight in exerting myself after the long season of illness and idleness, carried me forward with incredible speed. Take shorthand. It was Pitman's system I had to learn. The teacher gave me one lesson and told me what text-books to get. I mastered the system in three days. Not that I could use it fluently; but I made the theory my own and only needed practice to be a swift writer. But then, during those three days, and I should add nights, I lived shorthand; every moment, every thought I could spare, was given to it. Mrs. Paterson read out from the papers at night, slowly to start with and faster as I grew expert. After three weeks' practice I ventured to take down from Mr. Meiklejohn's dictation, and if the characters were awful hieroglyphics I could at least decipher them myself. Once I could use the typewriter I was of value in the office. All the correspondence was left to me, and the assistant was free to help Meiklejohn in technical work.

This assistant, Mr. Allardyce, was a young man of about twenty-one. He lodged in Craigkenneth and cycled or walked to Lowis every morning. Bob was the sort of lad best described in the words: "He's the better of having a father before him." He was the son of a big sheep-farmer in the north and he ought to have kept to his father's calling; at any rate, he was not made for a factor. Careless and easygoing, he was clever also, and had a good-humoured gentlemanly way that gained him friends everywhere. I admired him more than if I had shared his gifts; indeed, he became my hero when I heard him banter Meiklejohn, and even answer the admiral with airy unconcern. Naturally, Bob made fun of me, joked at my seriousness, my industry, my respect for Meiklejohn, my reverence for the admiral. When strangers called at the office inquiring for the factor, he would gravely point them to me. With all this he was kind; how could he be other to one who admired him so? Occasionally. in spite of my returning health, the evil days I had once known would give me a hint that I had not escaped them without a scar: sudden faintness or sickness would threaten me. When Bob noticed the symptoms—and he often detected them with surprising sharpness—he would call out, "I'll attend to that, squire. Away you and look for woodcock;" and if I hesitated, doubtful whether to leave without Mr. Meiklejohn's knowledge, he would take me by the shoulders and run me out.

## CHAPTER XV

RS. SETON never felt so well as when at home, and for her sake the family waited in the country all that winter. So it came that often. It was known by this time that she was to marry the Marquis of Soar. One evening when I was at the factor's house playing draughts, I overheard Mrs. Seton's maid give particulars about the wedding. It was to be celebrated in June, and Miss Seton, who was engaged to a naval officer, would be married on the same day. The mother would have liked her older daughter to wait a little, but there was a reason for the double wedding. The prince was intimate with Lord Soar, and would attend at the ceremony. If Miss Seton were married along with her sister, she would share in the honour. That Miss Maymie and the marquis were lovers my own eyes had taught me. On one of his visits to Lowis I had surprised him in the woods strolling with Miss Maymie, his arm round her waist. A few months earlier the sight would have overpowered me. I was another lad now. My late illness-a crisis in my life-would have something to do with the change. There was a cause more powerful. I was no longer a lonely maltreated wretch with nothing but wild dreams to live on. I had friends, I had pleasant, absorbing work, I had books to read when work was over. To these I could give myself with single mind. The dear image that used to haunt my heart no longer interposed; no more of those sweet talks that needed no spoken word; that sure sign of love, the constant presence of the absent, was gone. A wondrous change! Yet, strange to say, I scarcely thought of it at the time; only later did I remark it, and only long after did I marvel at it.

It was to Miss Maymie's family, not to Miss Maymie herself, that I was now devoted. If she was still worshipped, it was mainly because she was a Seton. The house seemed at the top of fortune. The admiral had a large and growing income, his wife's health was almost restored, his only son was a promising boy, his daughters were marrying well, one indeed brilliantly. It was, then, with surprise and even a sense of personal wrong that I learned there was still something needed to make his happiness perfect. He had looked in at the office one forenoon while I was working with Meiklejohn at elevations for a new steading. The pair chatted without heeding me. Master Reginald would soon be home for the Easter vacation, and the factor remarked,

"He'll be wearying for the day, poor laddie; he's always

glad to be home."

The admiral rejoined at once and in quite a snappish tone.

"I don't want him to be too fond of it," he said; and, as if in answer to an inquiring glance, he explained, "There's nothing in the world would give me greater disappointment than to see Reggie disposed to settle down here as a plain country gentleman."

" Indeed?"

"Yes, Meiklejohn. I want him to go out into the world and do something to make our house secure."

"Well, sir," said the factor slowly, "I should think it was

pretty secure as it stands."

"That's quite a mistake, Meiklejohn. You imagine that because a family has a good property and bears an old name it'll last for ever. Nothing of the sort. Look at the Forresters now. Even as late as my father's time they made a figure."

"I daresay, sir. And at one time, I suppose, they were the

biggest lairds in the county, holding off the duke."

"That's true. Their rent-roll would even be higher than the duke's, for most of their property was good low-country land. Where are they now?" And the admiral answered his own question by flicking the ash of his cigar into the fireplace.

"Ay," said Mr. Meiklejohn with a shake of the head;

"and the old castle occupied by a distiller."

"True. And, mind you, it wasn't with extravagance or any fault of their own, so far as I can learn. Simply they went down, down, year by year; one loss after another till all went."

"Ay, it's sad to see an old house disappear like that."

"It is; very sad. But look at this now, Meiklejohn. Take Lord Glenteith; the damnedest scamp, when he was a

youngster, that ever betted on a race-course. Went through two fortunes in half a dozen years, his own and his first wife's; sold every acre he possessed. When she dies he marries again, marries the cotton heiress, settles down, buys one estate after another, till now he's a bigger man than any of his people were."

"It's perfectly true, sir. He has bought back most of his own land even."

"He has. And the difference between him and the Forresters was merely this, Meiklejohn: he had a title. A man may be ruined, ay, beggared; his title will get him a wife with a fortune any day, and set him up again."

"So you think, sir, that a title's the thing to make a family

safe?" suggested Meiklejohn.

"Undoubtedly; a hereditary title. Blood doesn't count—at least by itself. A man of family has little advantage over another unless he has the title. Wealthy girls and all connected with them must see the title ere they part with their cash."

"Those American girls seem desperately fond of a title,

anyway."

"All those new rich people are. And that's what I hold: to give a family a title, a hereditary title, is as good as pre-

senting it with a million sterling."

"You're perfectly right, sir, now I think of it. In fact, it's better. For the million could be spent, whereas the title is there for all time, and can bring a million into the family any day."

"Any day;" and the admiral gave his hand a wave. In a little he resumed, "It's with that view I want Reggie to go into the diplomatic service. That seems the likeliest line to reach a title on. The navy's a lottery; the army's no better."

"I was hoping to see him member for the county before

I die," said the factor with a smile.

"Quite useless, Meiklejohn. Our side has no chance, here at any rate; those damned Radicals sweep the country. The south isn't so bad; but I haven't much interest there. No; the diplomatic line is the only likely one, and with average luck Reggie should reach something. But if he once gets attached to country life, he's lost. I know how the damned thing gets round one. You want to see your oats grow and your stock fatten and new steadings go up, and you

feel things can't go on without you. No, no; Reggie mustn't get on that tack. Better he should never set foot on Lowis more."

There was silence for a minute or two. Then the admiral

remarked,

"Of course, if Reggie is to be away so much, it would mean that he'd have all the more need of faithful watchers to look after his interests here." The factor made no response, and the admiral added, "And you and I, Meiklejohn, can't be at the wheel for ever."

"There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it;"

and Meiklejohn gave a laugh.

"I sometimes doubt that, Meiklejohn. However, we'll

do what we can now and hope for the best after."

Without more talk the admiral wished us both good-day and moved out of the room slowly and with bent head. I felt for him heartily. It was a shame he should want anything that might increase his own or his family's welfare. Had I been king, I should have ennobled him on the spot.

If I could not give him this gratification, I tried to further his interests wherever I had the power. Here is an instance. The Setons had gone to town in May. A month later the admiral took a run home on business, meaning to stay only three days. The second day of the visit Meiklejohn and I were out measuring part of a field on the Home Farm that was in potatoes. The crop had been bought green-sale by a Craigkenneth dealer, who would have measurers sent out from a surveyor's office. It was Meiklejohn's practice, however, to go over the ground himself. The admiral was out with us holding the staffs, and on the way back, as he and the factor were talking of different estate matters, he remarked,

"I was looking at the calves, Meiklejohn; they don't

appear to be thriving."

The admiral kept a small pedigree herd of Highland cattle, which usually grazed in the park. Two of the cows had lately calved, and as they might have been dangerous they were kept with their calves in a small field a little to the north.

Meiklejohn owned he had not been looking them regularly.

What did the cattleman say?

"Duncan agrees that they're not coming on fast. He blames the dry season. Grass is scarce and the cows are short of milk."

"He's maybe right;" and the factor cited a case he had once known.

A few days later I was at Cringletree, an upland farm where a new steading was building. Late in the afternoon, as I was returning through the woods, I noticed a little girl coming along the footpath. It was Colina Macdiarmid, the cattleman's youngest child. The instant she spied me she slipped aside, and she kept the bushes between us till I was by. My glance had shown me that she was carrying two small enamelled pails. I daresay I should have had no suspicion but for the attempt to hide. Little Colina knew me and had nothing to fear. The admiral's words came to mind, and question after question flashed up. What was the child carrying? Milk; that was certain. Where to? Between us and Cringletree was a double cottage where some of the tradesmen lodged who were engaged on the new farm-buildings. Where was the milk coming from? I guessed at once, and it took me only two days to make sure. On the afternoon when I reached the office with my guess confirmed, the factor was out, but bursting with the secret I had to discharge it on his assistant.

"I say, Bob," I began ere I was well seated, and there was a sly chuckle of delight in my voice, "I know why the Highland calves are not coming on."

Bob had been checking some accounts. He looked up

unconcernedly.

"Who says they're not coming on?"

"Oh, of course you didn't hear the admiral. He was complaining to Mr. Meiklejohn about them."

" Yes?"

"And I've found out the reason. Guess what it is."

"Ringworm or some blasted ailment."

"You're all wrong. It's because they're not getting milk."

"That's their own fault. They have the cows there for the sucking."

"Yes; but somebody else sucks the cows. Duncan milks

them and sells the milk."

Bob did not speak; he merely rubbed his chin with his left hand, a trick he had when puzzled. Ere he found words I rushed into the tale. How I became suspicious, the way I took to satisfy myself, all was told with glee. Then I disposed myself to enjoy the effect of the story.

My companion had stopped rubbing his chin; he looked at me with puckered brows.

"Damn it! What made you come and tell me?"

The question, still more the way it was asked, so surprised me that in my turn I was silent for a little.

"Well," I said at length, "I thought I'd just tell you when

Mr. Meiklejohn wasn't here."

"I'm not Mr. Meiklejohn, James, and I don't recollect ever asking you to come to me first with such stories. Are you aware, my virtuous young gentleman," he went on, looking fixedly into my staring eyes; "are you at all aware of what will happen when this becomes known?"

"Duncan 'll get the road."

"Precisely; he'll get the road. Oh, infernal!" And he groaned as if I had kicked him on a sore place.

Though I could not comprehend his emotion, I saw that the discovery had affected him very differently from me.

"Do you think I oughtn't to tell Mr. Meiklejohn?" I asked, quite bent on telling, however; the story was too good to keep.

Bob rubbed his chin a while.

"Well, sir," he answered at last, "since you've been good enough to tell me, it will hardly do not to tell Mr. Meiklejohn. But remember this in future: when you've anything of the sort on your mind, you'll go to Mr. Meiklejohn direct and not come to me. Is that plain enough?" he demanded, with a harshness in his voice and eyes that made me quail.

I did not answer. When my fear passed I grew sulky, and I made no response to the "Ta-ta," with which Bob took his

leave as five o'clock struck.

I locked up and went straight to Parkend. The factor was not back yet. The secret would not keep for a night. I called again in the evening and found Meiklejohn at home. He took in the story with eyes and ears, and praised me for my smartness.

At the back of three the next afternoon he came into our

room.

"Take your cap, James; I want you to come out with me

for a bit. Some of us 'll be back before five, Robert."

Bob said nothing; he did not even glance at us. It was not the first time the factor and I had strolled together. Meiklejohn was childless, and he had taken a fatherly liking

for me, while I in turn was growing fond of the homely little man. The Lowis factor had not the look of one who wielded influence. He was short, spare, and wiry, quiet and plain both in speech and manner. His face was much wrinkled, especially round the eyes, and the glasses he wore, with his characteristic headgear—a small, narrow-brimmed hat, grey tweed for week-days, black felt on Sunday—aided in giving him an appearance that his neighbours described as "ancient." As we walked that afternoon towards Lowis House and then through the woods above, he showed no excitement, and he kept the talk off the business that had brought us that way. What books was I reading? he asked.

I was busy with an interesting one, a small collection of poems about birds. A great poet's verses on the Cuckoo had

charmed me and I repeated some to my friend.

"Very fine," was his comment. "And is this other one in your book?" and he quoted the opening lines of that still better-known ode whose authorship has been so hotly disputed.

I told him it was. He started and repeated it through

without a break.

"Do you know how long it is since I saw that, James? I haven't read it, to my knowledge, since I was a laddie at the school, far younger than you are now. Ay, it's a good fifty years since. The piece was in our reading-book."

"What a rare memory you have, Mr. Meiklejohn!" I

could not help saying.

"I used to have. Anything I learned I held like a vice. My memory weakened as I grew older, at least for some things. If I had learned that poetry after I was man-grown, I couldn't have repeated a line of it now. But for facts my memory remained as good as ever, and it's not bad yet. Give me any useful knowledge, any useful information, and I won't let it go readily."

As we moved on through the golden glades he kept to the

same talk.

"After all, that's the main thing, James, at least for work like ours—to have useful knowledge. That's what'll make you a capable factor, James."

"It'll be a long time before I'm fit to be a factor," I re-

marked with a laugh.

"You'll come on. Keep your eyes and ears open for all

kinds of practical knowledge. You have a capital foundation in having been trained to farm-work. And in some things you have advantages I never possessed. You've time enough to make yourself perfect at composition and spelling and so on. That has always been a weak point with me: I'm shaky when it comes to putting a letter together. Now, there's nothing to hinder you from mastering the two things, both the facts and the proper way of setting them out."

I said nothing, and my friend continued:

"It's true what the admiral said yon day, that the old folks can't last for ever. And if Master Reginald is to live mostly abroad when he comes to be laird, it'll need a capable man to look after the estate. And a trustworthy man, James. It's an awful thing not to be trustworthy. Just look at the case that we're here about to-day: a man with a comfortable place robbing his master who has every confidence in him! And what's the upshot? Disgrace and ruin. If ever you're in a position of trust, James, keep to sterling honesty, no matter how you may be tempted. For mind this, James: the admiral deserves well at your hands; he has been very good to you."

"I know that," I assented fervently.

"So if ever you serve him or his family in a more responsible post, attend to their interests as you would to your own."

By this we were a quarter of a mile above Lowis House and close to a curious range of whinstone rocks, half-moon in shape and clad to the crest with greenwood trees and shrubs. Come when you would in spring or summer, you found the place ablow. The sloe was the earliest to break. It wore its crown of snow while most of its neighbours were as yet without a leaf. The bird-cherry came next, its large milky blooms making a still braver display. Rowan and May-blsosom followed; the last, in spite of its name, hid its wreaths till June was in. That afternoon, as we struggled through the hazel bushes, I stopped many a time to admire the white and damask roses and the creamy elder-blooms.

Near the summit of the rocks the factor halted and, taking a field-glass from his pocket, surveyed the country below.

It was worth climbing to the spot for the view alone. The green wood we had lately traversed sloped like a great smooth bank till it was broken by the towers of Lowis House. Then began the rich tilled country, speckled with hamlets or single

dwellings and falling, as if in terraces, to the yet richer carse that spread, a broad flat plain, to the sluggish Fertha. Across the river was a narrower belt of carse, a shorter reach of upland, and then the eye was led up to the Ogle Hills, their sides, all but some rocky steeps, a pastoral green till they merged in the blue of heaven. If my glance ranged so far, my friend's was kept to this side of the river, the domain where lay his interests and his duties. So, at least, I gathered from the remark that followed the survey,

"It's a fine compact estate-Lowis. That's the only thing that spoils it;" and he gave a nod towards the offensive

"Do you mean the right-of-way past the Den?" I asked, referring to a path I knew the admiral would fain have closed.

"Tuts!" said Meiklejohn impatiently. "What harm does that do? It's a mere whim of the admiral's. No, James. I mean that place of Ralston's. It lies in the middle of Lowis like a blot on a page. If the admiral could get Cambuslochan, he would have as tight and trim an estate as there is in the country. It's as square as a blanket."

The words were not pleasant to hear and I made no rejoinder. It was well known that the admiral coveted the little property on the Stracht and would have bought it at any figure. But far be the day, I hoped, when Mr. Ralston and his bride would leave their home! They had been as good to me as

the Setons and were as dear.

"Talking about facts, James," my companion resumed after a short silence, "one must make sure, of course, that they are facts and not take everything on hearsay. Now, there's your old friends down yonder;" and as he took the glass from his eyes he nodded in the direction of the Mailing. "I see they're working in a park of cabbages; I suppose they're filling up the blanks with swedes. Well, the old man would tell you, I have no doubt, and so would every farmer I've encountered, that swedes will transplant and yellow turnips won't."

"Yes, that's what old Ni—, I mean Mr. Gow, believes."

"Just so;" and the factor again put up the glass. "Now, that's a very good instance, James, of how a thing comes to be taken on mere hearsay. It's perfectly true that the thinnings of yellows—"

What the thinnings might or might not be capable of I was

not to learn at the time; for my friend, who in his roving survey had never kept his eye for long off one spot, an open space to the west of the mansion-house, changed his tone to an excited whisper: "There he comes!"

After keeping the glass fixed on the spot for some minutes

he thrust it into my hand.

"Watch every movement, James, and tell me. My eyes are strained and are watering too much."

I had already observed the two cows with their calves move through the field towards the wood. Aided by the glass, I now distinguished the kilted Duncan who had crossed the fence, had set a pail on the grass and was opening a small bag.

"He's giving the cows something to eat," I reported.

"Cake," said the factor as confidently as though he had been at Duncan's elbow. "That's why the beasts come so readily."

"He's giving some to the calves as well," I continued.

"Will that be good for them?"

"Enough to kill them," said my friend in helpless

"He's kneeling down beside the red cow," I went on;

"he's starting to milk her."

Meiklejohn snatched the glass and glanced through it for a moment.

"It's time I was down having a hand in the ploy," he said grimly. "The damned Hielan' thief!" and without waiting for my company he ran down the rocky bank.

I hurried after him, though we did not change a word till

we reached the spot where our ways parted.

"Wait in the office, James, till I come back," was all the little man could say. Ere I answered, he was speeding down the woods like a trained racer.

Had folk been watching me as I strolled back to the office. they would have concluded I had parted with my wits. I was picturing the encounter between the irate factor and his delinquent cattleman. How Duncan would look when he found himself trapped! How stupefied. The scene was so comic that every little while I had to vent my merriment in a roar. At the office I would fain have made Bob a partner in my glee, but that young gentleman had an aloofness in his manner that kept me silent, though I could not repress odd sniffs and chortles when fancy was busy. Bob had left ere

the factor, his face still pink and perspiring, reached the office.

"Did you catch him?" was my eager question.

He assured me with a meaning glance and shake of the head.

"I caught him as clean as a trout. He never heard a move-ment till I was crossing the fence. Then he darts his head round and sees me within five yards of him. Man! if you had seen his face!"

I roared, and my outbursts interrupted every sentence as the factor went on:

"He springs up and looks at me as if I were a ghost. 'You're busy, Duncan,' I said. Not a word. 'It's little wonder the calves are not thriving.' He had turned his head away by this and he stands a bit without speaking; then he found his tongue and began to plead with me not to inform. I would never have another cause of complaint and so forth. He tried to come over me with talk about his wife and young children: what were they to do? However, I shut his mouth. I told him the children would be better away from here: they would soon be as big thieves as himself."

"Did he know what you meant?"

"He gave me a puzzled kind of look till I said, 'Ay, Duncan, we know who carries the milk to the Cringle cottages. Man, ye think yourself cunning, and there's not a step ye take but we have our eye on ye. Now,' I said, 'you're dismissed from this moment. Your wife will be told in a day or two what's to be done with herself and the bairns. As for you, it's more than likely that the next word you get will be from the police.' He must have had enough by this, for he stooped down to take the can of milk and make off; but I said, 'No, no, Duncan; it's the calves' turn now,' and sure enough the poor beasties were at the pail already, and I was like to be knocked over, trying to give them a drink in turns."

For some time I could do nothing but laugh. "Look here, Mr. Meiklejohn," I said when I was able to speak, "how did he manage to keep the calves from sucking?

That's been puzzling me."

"It puzzled me too, though I have my suspicions. I wasn't near enough the cows to examine them; in fact, to tell you the honest truth, I wasn't anxious to be too near;

but I'm almost positive that their teats were discoloured; so that the rascal must have put wormwood or some bitter concoction on them to keep the calves from sucking. The damned Hielan' devil! That I should say so!"

The vigorous language, so unusual with my friend, witnessed to his warmth of feeling. The whole story, with his

manner of telling it, was to me a rare comedy.

"I'd have liked to see his face. Ho! ho!" and I roared till the factor, who had been disposed to keep a grim

face, was infected and grew as hilarious as myself.

Fraser, the vet., was 'phoned for and came over the same evening. He confirmed the factor's surmise about the wormwood. Duncan vanished, and did not appear even when his wife and children flitted from their snug cottage at the woodside. This happened within the week; for, though the admiral did not prosecute, he sent stern orders that the whole family should be cleared off the estate without a day's delay.

Duncan fell; I rose. Next pay-day Meiklejohn handed me six shillings instead of five, and informed me that this was to be my weekly pay in future. Board and lodging cost me nothing, for the admiral had arranged about these at the

calle but we have our eye on the Now! I said, ' you're dis-

there was act of engine Presert and Parcon and now that

first with my old landlady.

"I could do with it for a vent. Most, Miss Puton, just think of the action work in gives the Medicipoles. There's never never nevel for mountle force tent me is been away one day at been and sometimes have been away one day at been and sometimes have the constitution from some

## CHAPTER XVI

S I grew better versed in estate management, I found there were hidden and winding ways for reaching one's end. The mention of my rise of pay suggests one. When I was at Meiklejohn's in the evenings playing draughts, I often met Mrs. Seton's maid, who had been long with the family and was understood to get much of her mistress's mind. The factor and his wife kept very close to her, had her often over to supper, and were trying or professed to be trying to find a mate for her among the Lowis farmers. It was an evening some weeks before Duncan's disgrace. The four of us were in the Parkend parlour, Meiklejohn and I at the board, the ladies gossiping. I overheard the factor's wife complain that her husband had been often from home lately owing to feuing at Claygate. This was a Clydesdale property that had come to the admiral's father by marriage. Of little agricultural value, it was being worked for fire-clay, and the output was increasing every year.

"They're putting up over a hundred new houses for the workers," I heard Mrs. Meiklejohn remark.

"Yes, houses for a hundred and forty families," said Miss Paton, who seemed to know more about estate affairs than even her friend. "A little town in itself. That Claygate place is a fair gold-mine to the admiral."
"I suppose it must be," said the other, and she waited as

if to let her friend continue.

The factor's wife was a little plump, black-eyed lady, who

spoke with an engaging lisp.

"Yes," Miss Paton went on; "with one thing and another—of course, this is between ourselves—it's never worth less than twelve thousand a year. Yes, and it'll get better every year."

"Tu-tu-tu," lisped the little woman, as if much impressed;

"I could do with it for a year. But, Miss Paton, just think of the extra work it gives Mr. Meiklejohn. There's never been a week for months back but he's been away one day at least, and sometimes he has stayed overnight to save him from going back the next day."

"Do you hear that, Mr. Meiklejohn?" asked the lady'smaid with a laugh. She was a loud-voiced buxom hussy of "Your goodwife doesn't over forty and liked a broad joke.

like to be so much alone at night."

Usually when Meiklejohn was at his favourite game he needed some shaking-up ere he could answer an outside remark. This time his reply came with surprising readiness.

"Ay, ay, Miss Paton; but business must be attended to.

Business before pleasure, you know."
"It is too bad, though," the lady's-maid admitted. "Really there must be plenty to do at Lowis without having to run away there every week."

"Yes; and the worst of it is there's nothing for the extra work,"-and the factor's wife gave a little laugh,-" although

the place must be bringing in ever so much more."

I was listening now for every syllable, and if the factor was not listening as well, he was certainly taking a long time for

very easy moves.

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Paton. Then, as if her friend's hint had at last been caught, she added reflectively, "He ought to have something, and something substantial. I daresay it's just from thoughtlessness that it's been neglected."

"Perhaps this wouldn't be the best time to mention it?" the other suggested. "With the weddings coming on they'll

be having heavy expense."

"Expense is nothing to them," Miss Paton assured her. "And I don't know but this might be the very best time.

They're all in grand spirits just now."

Whether the factor's extra work was duly acknowledged I was never told. I presume it was, for I heard no more complaints made to Miss Paton about the Claygate journeys. This would be the process. Meiklejohn would first have spoken to his wife, if that worthy little lady needed any hint. She spoke to the maid, the maid would speak to her mistress, the mistress to her husband. Mrs. Seton was a plain, quiet lady and seemed to leave estate affairs to her energetic husband and his officials; but I was beginning to learn that it was the quietest people who sometimes had the last word.

The double wedding was celebrated in London early in July. There were great rejoicings on the Lowis estate, and Bob and I had a rare time preparing bonfires and arranging free feasts for old and young. Strange, strange past belief it seems now that through it all I scarcely once thought of Miss Maymie as having been anything to me. Since that winter at the Mailing two years had not passed; but for her I could not have lived through those dark days, yet here was I, leader in the merrymaking that celebrated her union with another. When at moments I did recall her as my worshipped queen, the memory had no sadness; rather I took pride in that I had been joined, though only in the realm of dreams, with one so high.

The echoes of the wedding rejoicings were still in the air when a different ceremony, in which I also had an interest, called for observance. Old Phemie died after a short illness. Scandal declared she had over-eaten herself at the tenants' dinner. The factor assumed that I should be going to the funeral, and when I objected that there had been no kindness

between us, he insisted.

"Blood's thicker than water. You're about as near a connection as there's left and, though the old body 'll likely have left everything to her brother, that may be all the better for you in the long run. I'd advise you to draw closer to him. You must by no means miss the funeral. The old man 'll like to see you there, for folk appreciate a little attention as they get up in years and feel their loneliness. Ay, you must cultivate him more, and any time you're speaking to him call him 'Uncle' just in a natural sort of way. I can tell you this on sure authority: he's worth keeping in with, and I'd rather a thousand times you should be the better of him than that black scoundrel Mackinlay."

So to the funeral I went, stood in the Mailing parlour which I had never entered before, returned Big Pate's scowl and took a glass of port from Florrie's tray without a word of thanks. At Lucas kirkyard, when the black coffin was to be lowered into the clay trench, the factor gently pushed me forward and put a cord in my hands. We spoke for a minute

with old Nicol. He thanked me for coming.

Phemie, we learned afterwards left no will. She had

banked her money in her own and her brother's names to make sure, I suppose, that the painfully gathered hoard should never pay death-dues.

"It's maybe waiting for you yet," the factor said. "I think you should act on my advice and keep in with your old uncle."

Legacy-hunting, surely, can have little charm for most lads of seventeen; it had none for me. I should not have given a straw for old Nicol's fortune though it had been counted in millions, not thousands. It was Meiklejohn who was set on making me the heir, and I daresay his main motive was to keep Pate out. The very week after the funeral I had to accompany him to the Mailing. The old farmer welcomed us with evident pleasure, brought out his bottle for the factor, made Florrie fetch port for me. When the two men were yoked to the talk, I slipped out to explore the old place. If there is no greater pain than to recall happy times in misery, it heightens present joys to revisit scenes of suffering past. I glanced into the bothy where I had often borne a fiend's cruelty; the walls were still hung with harness, on the bed I used to share the second ploughman, who had come in Bob's place two months before, lay smoking. the byre-gang I encountered my old tyrant. I looked at him with set eyes and he could only return a sidelong glance. There was the barn-loft where I had lodged on many a strange night, with Ranger and sometimes the Wanderer for company. Ranger, looking no older than in those days, attended me on my round; he had never been in danger of forgetting me. for I petted him whenever we met. Florrie had given us a smiling welcome when Meiklejohn and I arrived, and now as I passed through the kitchen to the parlour she smiled again and said it was a nice night. The old hate surged to my brain so wildly that little would have made me clutch her by the throat and choke out her life. At parting old Nicol invited the factor to come again soon: "I'm lonely, man; I've naebody noo;" and Meiklejohn promised to call when he could and bring me with him, adding, "You can't say you've nobody so long as you've a promising laddie like this sib to you."

My friend was satisfied with the visit. I must repeat it, he urged, till my old uncle could not do without me. Meikle-john was a shrewd man; but what chance has shrewdness

with Fate?

One evening when I had come home from the office and was sitting down to tea, Mrs. Paterson asked,

"You'll have heard the news, James?"

"What is it?"

"About the Mailing? No? You haven't heard that Pate Mackinlay's wife has turned up?"

I was silent a while. It took me an effort to recollect that

Big Pate had a wife.

"Is that true?" I asked at last.

"There's no question of it, James. Jean Dawson told me first. I don't take everything Jean says for gospel; but Hendry went past not half an hour since, and he told me he had come round by the Mailing and saw the woman in the garden."

"Has she been in the asylum all this time? They used to

say she was there."

"According to Jean there's a lot of stories going about and it's not for me to repeat them. But there she is now,

anyway."

My old landlady then gave me the story as it had been told to her. The woman had landed two nights before, to Pate's consternation. She had interviewed old Nicol and must have got leave to stay overnight. All next day she was helping about the house, and there she was still.

Meiklejohn had the news next morning, though not so

circumstantially. Ere the office closed he asked,

"You were coming along to-night, James?"

"Yes."

"You'll come, then, just as we arranged. Only, instead of having a game we'll take a stroll along and pay our respects to your old uncle. He asked us, you mind. And the fact is,

I want to have a look at things for myself."

My uncle's tall, lean figure was visible in the garden as we neared the house. The old man was not looking our way, and when he did recognise us he seemed uncomfortable. Instead of asking us in, he came out to the loan and tried to draw us away. Shrill voices were crossing each other like keen sword-blades inside the house. Meiklejohn would not leave the spot, and he made talk about the oats that were standing stooked in the field beside us. When the noise hushed within-doors, old Nicol, asking us to wait a minute, hurried into the house, and soon he reappeared at the door

and waved us in. We were not well seated when he brought

out the liquor.

"Flor—" he was calling, but checked himself with "I'll fetch the water," and he made for the door. Someone met him in the trance, for we heard a voice: "I brought the jug; I thought you might need it, uncle. Oh! I'll take it in since I'm here. Don't you trouble, uncle." The next moment a women appeared, with old Nicol close behind. She greeted us with a smile and nod, and remarked, as she set the water down,

"There's no use in having a dog and barking yourself. But my uncle here will be doing. I tell him he should take

a rest when folks are willing to do for him."

"You're perfectly right," said the factor heartily. "If our friend had been in hands like yours constantly, he'd have been as fresh as any young fellow to-day. You shouldn't have left him to himself so long."

"It's true enough; but, of course, our poor auntie was here

till lately."

"So she was," assented my friend. "Still, both she and Mr. Gow here would have been the better of a body like you about them."

While the pair talked, I was trying to read the woman. She was tall and stout, fair-haired, with a full, though oval, face and good features, the nose especially being large and shapely. Her eyes were a very bright grey. Altogether, a striking, even a remarkable figure. Her age I could not guess; this only I saw: she was much older than she tried to look.

"You'll be taking him in charge now?" the factor suggested.
"I'll do my endeavour, and if he's none the better of the

change it'll no be my fault."

"I'm sure of that. You'll be a help both inside the house and out. You're quite at home with farm-work, I suppose?"

My friend was bent on making the woman talk, and she was quite ready to gratify him. She would feel, like most of her sex, that she need not shrink from a wordy passage with any man. But old Nicol broke in:

"Help yourselves, friends. Fill up your glass. That's a' we need, Bab;" and when the woman was about to speak he added sharply, "We'll manage oorsels noo," and gave an impatient movement with his hand which made her withdraw. "Ay, ay," remarked the factor, when we had the parlour

to ourselves, "so there's nothing but changes, Nicol. As one rises, another sits doon."

"Nothing but changes;" and the old man shook his head as he looked into his tumbler.

"And you think you'll be more comfortable with a connection of your own to manage the house?" Meiklejohn pursued.

"It's a' to try, it's a' to try," said the farmer, and his dry tone kept my friend from questioning him further at the time.

The talk ran on crops and cattle till the whisky made a second round. Meiklejohn may have judged that his host would now prove more communicative.

"You're not to forget this laddie o' yours, Nicol," he said, "though you're getting new friends. He promises to be a credit to you. I can answer for him myself, for he's with me constantly."

"I'm glad to hear o't, real glad to hear o't. Attend to your work, Jamie, and if ye dae weel for yersel' ye'll dae weel

for me."

"Then you're keeping him in mind, Nicol?" asked my friend, whose own tongue must have been loosened by the liquor.

"I'm no forgettin' Jamie," the old man assured him. "And now aboot thae cross-heifers, Meiklejohn;" and he reverted to the last topic, nor could the factor bring him

back to family affairs.

"And what do you think of your new relation, my good boy?" the factor inquired as we walked towards Parkend under the full harvest moon. My friend's speech was slower and his manner more affectionate than usual, and he leant pretty heavily on my arm.

"She looks a woman that has something in her," I replied.

"Something in her, James! Quite right, my boy. You'll do, once you've a little more experience. Something in her. Yes; I should say, in fact, she's an extra smart woman. And how do you think she has been employed of late, James?"

"I-I never thought of that. She seemed too fat to have

been working much.'

"Too fat to have been working much! Haw, haw, haw! Good again, James. You just need the experience to be a clever chap. Yes, she's too fat, and her hands are too white and soft. And what might be her weakness, James?"

"Her weakness?"

"Yes, my boy; her little failing, James, her besetting sin,

so to speak?"

"I—I couldn't say. I never thought of that either. People used to say she was in an asylum—was off her head."

"James my boy, I'm older than you, could be your father and more, and have seen all sorts of folks, and I'll tell you my belief. My belief is, James," the little man went on, speaking slowly and solemnly, "that she's a drunkard. You say she was off her head, in an asylum, so on. All right; I don't say no. What I do say is, if she was off her head it was with drinking. You mark me, James?"

"Yes, Mr. Meiklejohn. But I was going to ask, did you hear the row before we went into the house? The two women

quarrelling, no doubt."

"No doubt of it, James; a fair tug-of-war between the two jades. And you mark my words, James: the new one is the winner."

"That other one, the maid, is a vicious, determined

character," I said.

"All right, James; not saying a word against it. What I say is, she's no match for Mrs. Mac—Mackinlay. Haw, haw, haw! That is, mind you, if Mrs. Mackinlay keeps straight and doesn't go off this way or that way;" and, without meaning it, my old friend gave a tolerable illustration of the lady's possible movements. "But I'm going to tell you something, James: I don't envy old Nicol in the meantime. No, James. I don't envy your old uncle; I don't. And what's more, James, I don't envy Mr. Mac—Mackinlay. Haw, haw, haw!"

After seeing my old friend safely housed, I wandered home, taking a short cut through one of the Mains fields. Fortune-hunting was not in my thoughts. As I glanced at the half-moon gleaming like silver in the blue heavens, as I listened to the fresh night-breeze rustling the stooks, I felt that youth and health and hope were mine, and that I was already rich.

The war between the two women was short. Not three weeks after our visit I was at Cambuslochan one evening with a drawing I had made for Mr. Ralston. That gentleman had an inventive knack, and sometimes asked me to put his ideas in a sketch. He was busy just now with what he called a "load-adjuster," a contrivance for so arranging the contents of a cart that whether the horse was going up- or down-hill

it would find the load as evenly distributed as when on the level.

"By-the-by, James," he remarked, "that maid of your uncle's is leaving—Florrie."

I could scarcely credit it.

"It's true enough," my friend assured me. "Sandy"—this was Mr. Ralston's ploughman—"told me to-day that she had been at him inquiring about a place near Blane. Sandy belongs to that quarter. She had been speaking about Mackinlay; perhaps Sandy would be chaffing her; anyhow, she let out in her spite that Mackinlay was deserting her and siding with his wife. It seems the wife has made him thoroughly frightened that you'll be the heir unless they get the old man into their hands. I'd be glad, James, if their fears came true, though, mind you, they won't stick at anything to keep you out."

I did not repeat the news to Meiklejohn. It was not long, indeed, till the whole neighbourhood knew. Florrie left two months before Martinmas, and Pate's wife hired a young girl

to help in the dairy-work.

"She's an able jade," Meiklejohn acknowledged with a certain admiration. "However, she's not to have things her own way altogether. I'll see that the old man doesn't forget you."

"Dundou!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to say the

## CHAPTER XVII

O inexperienced youth the wildest ventures seem easy. Often enough its self-confidence is shamed; at odd times it is triumphantly justified. I was at the age, and the chance did not fail to come. In my second summer at the office Meiklejohn was asked to go through to the neighbourhood of Salisbury, where Mrs. Seton's people had a property, and give advice on the valuation of some stock. The factor took his wife and sister-in-law with him, and suggested that I might have my holiday in their company. Except the two days that Meiklejohn and I had to give to our business at Cray Park, our time—a fortnight altogether-was spent in London. My friends then went on to Germany to visit a niece, and I came north alone. The train I travelled by was a fast one, and I was surprised when it stopped at a little roadside station just over the Border. Looking out I saw that the engine was detached as if for shunting.

"Short of water, or what?" I asked the conductor, who had left his van and was strolling along the platform.

"No, no, sir. We're taking on the milk-trucks," and he nodded towards a siding where three waggons laden with milk-cans were standing.

"Where does the milk go to?" I asked carelessly.

" Dundee."

"Dundee!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to say the

milk travels a hundred miles!"

"A hundred and fifty-three," said the guard, and at the sight of my dumb wonder he explained. "It comes from Sir Irving Beattie's estates hereabout. His farmers all bring it in to the station here and it's sent away as one lot. I suppose Sir Irving found that Dundee was likely to be the best market. And then distance is nothing nowadays. We leave

here at 4.10 and are due at Dundee at 8.16. Say four hours. Plenty of milk-carts take about as long to drive into a town."

I admitted he was right.

"But the carriage will be expensive," I represented.

"Not so very expensive, I believe," he said. "Sir Irving gets easy rates, I'm told. He's a director."

The information made me thoughtful. I passed it on to Bob, and ere Meiklejohn was home we had satisfied ourselves that it was correct. Might we not try such a scheme? I wondered. The Lowis farmers who had milk to sell disposed of it locally, some hawking the villages, most supplying dairies in Craigkenneth. I knew that in Glasgow the market was unlimited. Every time I glanced down the advertisement columns of the Glasgow paper I saw a dozen dairies needing milk. But my notion was to be independent of outside dairies. These gave, I knew, eightpence or ninepence per gallon and retailed at a shilling or even fourteenpence. If all our tenants joined in the scheme, we should have store enough to supply a dairy of our own, and the big difference between wholesale and retail prices would cover working expenses and leave a handsome profit. I believed, too, that milk production would increase. Stock were not paying except on the largest holdings, grain, though improving, was still low, and with fair encouragement many of the tenants might be glad to resume dairy-farming. Meiklejohn thought well of the project and promised to inquire about suitable localities, rents of premises, and such matters. He remarked—and I had reckoned on this from the first-that if the scheme were properly put before the admiral it would have his support. The admiral was speculative and was deep in business ventures already.

"One drawback I see," the factor said. "Sir Irving Beattie is a director and will get privileges from the railway. The admiral won't have the same influence, though I know he's

a large shareholder."

I had thought of this.

"Mr. Lyon is a director." This was the head of the Claygate Fire-Clay Company. "He can look after the admiral's case."

As we anticipated, the admiral leaped on the first cast. Meiklejohn had to go round the tenantry, drop hints of the project and learn their mind. They were curious but cautious. Then the admiral invited them to discuss the question over a dinner which he provided in the riding-school. After the feast—the whisky, we took care, was not scrimped—the admiral explained the scheme fully. The business was to be owned and managed by a joint-stock company, and to show his faith in its success he was ready to become chairman, and take up half the shares. His red-faced audience were by this time satisfied with themselves and disposed to be satisfied with their laird, and amid their applauding roars the Lowis

Milk Supply Company had its birth.

Ere the company got to work there had been many a change on the first rough plan. The boldest was dispensing with railway service altogether. This is how we worked. A motor-truck, built with tiers to increase its capacity, left the Home Farm every morning at half-past four and picked up the milk-cans at all the steadings on the Lang Stracht and the highway. Farms on by-roads had carts waiting for it at certain points. The motor ran in to Glasgow and left its freight at our dairy in Springburn. It came back during the day and made a second trip with the afternoon's milk. As compared with trains the motor saved time, money, and, most of all, labour. By enabling us to run in a second supply of milk fresh it did us a priceless service. The idea was my own, and I felt I deserved the unstinted praise it won me. So far as I know, this was the first use of the motor in milk-traffic.

Though the admiral's law-agent in Craigkenneth was the official secretary of the new company, the work at first fell mostly on the estate office. Admiral Seton allowed for this. A boy fresh from school, son of the Lucas schoolmaster, was engaged to help with the correspondence. My salary was

raised to ten shillings.

A bigger change took place in the winter. Bob went home, telling us he had had enough of factoring, and I was offered his place. The admiral himself came north to make the appointment, and said some flattering things to me about having an old head on young shoulders. Indeed, I was only eighteen and a half. As assistant factor I had a salary of sixty-five pounds to start with, but I was to board and lodge myself. Meiklejohn and his wife would have taken me to stay with them had they not felt to rob old Mrs. Paterson of a paying guest. As it was, I spent every other evening at Parkend.

It was not business dealings only that showed how thoroughly

the timid boy was lost in the self-confident youth. Soon after my appointment the young marchioness came home for Christmas with her brother and sister. Mrs. Seton was at home, but the admiral remained at Wollas Manor with Lord Soar, who was understood to be busy with estate affairs. Reginald had me with him constantly, and both the young ladies made me a favourite, though they affected to look on me still as a boy. I was certainly changed from the wasted lad they had sometimes noticed with pity. Outdoor exercise, good living, congenial work, above all, happy friendships, were giving my looks a chance. There was a hard frost that season and we were often skating. One day the four of us went to Loch Share, a beautiful tarn high up on the moors. I looked after Miss Maymie, while Reginald attended to his older sister. To help Miss Maymie on and off with her skates hardly gave me a thrill; once the mere thought would have made me swoon, maybe die. We had skated on till long past the close of day; the full moon was up and the lone tarn gleamed like a diamond shield. At last we started homeward. As we marched down the moorland road, Miss Maymie, who, had surprised me already with her knowledge of estate affairs, plied me with questions about the Milk Supply Company. She wondered if something like it could not be started on the Daventry estates. But then the duke would need me to manage it, and papa wouldn't care to part with me.

"You could get the steward's place at the manor," she remarked after more of this talk. "Only it's such a big house that you would need a wife to keep it. I'd look out an English

girl for you. How would that do, James?"

Now, whether unthinkingly or no, her ladyship, who had been my companion from the time we left the tarn, had been stepping out more briskly than usual for some minutes back, so that, at the moment the words were spoken, Reggie and his sister were out of earshot. As I have hinted, I had no sheepishness now with women or men. I told the marchioness with a laugh that I could not tell: I had never met any English girls.

"Perhaps you haven't thought about girls yet? Oh well,

there's time enough, James."

We were passing through the dark fir-woods and could not see each other well, else I should never have had boldness to speak as I did. And indeed, for all my assurance, for all my indifference to Miss Maymie, there was a tremble in my voice as I said.

"Do you know, Lady Soar, I've been in love already."

She gave her little chuckle. "Oh, James! surely not!"

"Yes, and long ago too," I insisted.
"Long ago! You couldn't be very mature, then. Who was it, James? May I know? Was it anybody I know?"

"Y-yes," I answered and laughed. "You should know

her very well."

"Some of the farmers' daughters, James?"

I roared with glee.

"Not at all, not at all. Very far from that; oh! very far indeed."

"I'll wager it was Len."

The guess, evening me with her sister, emboldened me to

say,
"You're very near. Try again." "I give it up. Tell me, James."

"You must guess, Lady Soar. I'll tell you if you guess

right."

"Oh, I can't. Don't be provoking, James. Tell me, now that you've told me so much. Come, James; there's Len and Reggie coming."

We had certainly slowed when the talk grew so interesting.

but I could not see or hear the others.

I got out the words, "It was you, Lady Soar," and something of the old passion, an ebbing wave of the flood, threatened my heart once more.

We walked on a while in silence.

"Really, James!" the lady said at last, and the tone, if amused, was not without feeling. "Was that before I knew you?'

"Yes'; it was before I came to the office at all. I was on

a farm at the time—Abbot's Mailing."

"Oh yes." After a few seconds she added, "You were badly treated there, weren't you? I heard papa say something about that."

"Yes; I wasn't well treated. Indeed, I couldn't have

lived through it if it hadn't been for thinking of you."

The earnestness of my tone was partly assumed, still it had a power. Miss Maymie's voice was very gentle as she said,

"How strange! And I knew nothing about it or even about you." In a little the chuckle returned to her voice: " Is the feeling quite gone now, James?"

"Anything but that," I answered without a falter. "Of course, it's different now because—because you're married."

She laughed again. Then she said.

"It's a pity I didn't know about that-I mean, about your being so badly treated. We might have helped you sooner."

Here Mrs. Matthias-James and Reggie did let us hear their voices, and certainly our talk had been so engrossing as almost to bring us to a stand.

"However," the marchioness found time to say, "it's possible I may be able to help you some time," and I thanked

her fervently.

We did not fall into such talk again, but it was only a few days after that I had a chance of testing the charm of English

girls.

In the last week of the year I was at Parkend one evening by invitation. I had supposed the factor wanted to make sure of me for draughts; I found, however, he had visitors, two young ladies. One, Mrs. Meiklejohn's niece, had been over in Germany, I already knew, for her education; the other, a fellow-student, belonged to Birmingham. The niece, a remarkably tall, erect girl, with swelling bust, attracted me first. She proved rather stiff, however, and as I thought too much of myself to bother with overcoming her reserve I drew off to her companion, Miss Round, a neatly made little lass, with red hair, very pure complexion, and maddening dimples in her fresh cheeks. She welcomed me at once, and I was soon of Miss Maymie's opinion, that an English girl was the one for me. The pair were chattering every now and then about their foreign life and friends; Miss Round sang to the other's accompaniment, and after the song Meiklejohn laid out the draught-board, in spite of protests from his wife and the girls, who wanted me for whist.

"One game, one game only; we haven't played this week," and leave was given on condition that the ladies should have

me afterwards.

While we were at the board the girls were looking out another song. They had not brought music and had to use Mrs. Meiklejohn's, which was rather ancient.
"Here you are, Nina," I heard Miss Round say at last, and

she sat down at the piano while the tall niece held herself

ready to sing.

The pianist played a few bars and her friend began. It was Haydn's song, "My mother bids me bind my hair." The words I knew already and liked; the air, which I now heard for the first time, is charming. But had both been ever so paltry, the singer would have made them divine. The pure soprano notes gushed out with such power, such passion, yet with such ease and freedom-I was at their mercy. If my friends had not been watching the singer, they would have remarked my white cheeks and wet eyes. When the factor and I resumed our game, I wilfully made blunders so as to join his niece the sooner. She was still beside the piano, turning over old music-sheets.

"Miss Fleming," I began, "I have heard you sing before."
"Indeed!" she said with more interest than she had yet favoured me with. "I don't remember ever meeting you."

She was so tall and straight that, though I am somewhat over the average height for a man, our eyes were level. I did not know I was gazing into hers so earnestly till a warm blush swept her face.

"I can't be mistaken," I insisted. "Did you not sing once at Lowis House?" While she was reflecting, I explained, "This is some years ago. It was at a kind of party in the

riding-school. It'll be-let me see-it'll be-

"I remember," the girl cried, her face lighting wonderfully; "I was visiting aunt at the time. But that's long. long ago; it was long before I went to Leipsic."

"Yes; it's three years ago—three years next month. You sang 'Mary Morison."
"Did I?" and she laughed. "It's more than I could do now, then. I don't recollect the name even at this moment."

"I haven't forgotten it, you see, and I'm not likely ever to forget it." When she looked at me questioningly, I continued, "You will have forgotten, no doubt, that, while you were singing, someone in the audience, a ploughboy, broke down and there was a little commotion and—"

"Yes, and I stopped," she cried. "I recollect it now, though I should never have recalled it myself. Yes; the boy

took ill or something."

"I was the boy, Miss Fleming."

"You! you, Mr. Bryce! I thought it was a ploughboy."

"I was a ploughboy at the time."

Her eyes spoke wonder though "Oh!" was all she said. She might be afraid of hurting me. We stood a few seconds without speaking; then I observed.

"You don't ask why I cried."

She laughed.

"I suppose you were ill or in trouble."

"Well, yes, I certainly was. I was in great distress, and I had heard the song before at a time when I was also in trouble. So that might account for my breaking down then. But I have nothing to trouble me now, and this is the first time I've heard the song you gave us to-night; and yet I had another breakdown, though in a quieter way. So I'm afraid your singing has to do with it."

She gave a little laugh, and said she mustn't sing any more, then. It was clear enough, though, that she was interested.

She and I were drawn for partners. During the game I was aware that she was often watching me; more than once, indeed, I caught her and we exchanged a smile. I was now satisfied that her looks were very attractive; as for her figure, it was that of a young queen. Her face was round and fresh, the features were small, almost babyish, but there was plenty of strength in the steady brown eyes under the thick meeting brows.

The rubber over, the two of us drew together.

"Do you know, Mr. Bryce," she began, "I could almost believe I recollect your face? It's only a dim memory, of course, just like a dream. You were sitting on the left-hand side of the hall."

"The right."

"Oh, indeed! You're quite sure?"

"Ah! but where are you supposed to be looking from?" I inquired. "Do you mean as you were looking or as I was looking?"

"As I was looking; that is, facing the audience."

"You're quite right, Miss Fleming. I was on the left side."

"And well forward?"

" Yes."

"And nearly at the wall?"

" Quite right again."

"Do you know how I recognised you?"

"No," I said, smiling.

"I must have glanced at you once or twice afterwards that night, and to-night, when you spoke of having been in trouble, your face had an expression that made me imagine I could recall you as you were then. But, of course, it may be fancy. Now that you're talking and not thinking, the expression is gone and I couldn't recognise you."

"Naturally. I'm not in trouble at present when I'm talking with you. But, Miss Fleming, you are changed too and it's by your voice I knew you again. You were only a schoolgirl then, and, if you'll allow me to say so, rather scraggy at

that."

She laughed gaily. "I must have been a guy if I was at all like my old photos. But I'm a sort of schoolgirl yet, you know."

"I know you're over at Leipsic for music. Do you mean

to come out as a professional?""

"If I get my own way. But papa and, still more, mamma are like to break their hearts at the idea. They don't under-

stand and they imagine all sorts of things."
"Look here, Nina," Miss Round called to her friend across the table at supper, "it was too bad of you trying to take my lad from me. But I mean to keep him now that I've got him back."

"Oh, we were only talking about old times. Do you know, auntie, Mr. Bryce recollects me from the night I sang at Lowis House three years ago? Do you recollect, auntie, what I sang?"

Neither Mrs. Meiklejohn nor her husband could name the

song, though both remembered the occasion.

"Mr. Bryce must have been more interested in my singing than you were," said their niece. "He could tell me the name of it."

She did not speak, however, nor did I, of the effect her sing-

ing had had upon me that night.

Both girls left next day, Miss Round having to return home. Nina paid another and a longer visit to her aunt. I would have had her singing constantly, and to make her gratify me I told her, as a great secret, of a pastime I sometimes indulged: I made verses. She had to see some of my attempts and she sang them to familiar airs. Most of the things were worthless and I will not repeat them. One, by a chance, has become popular. This is how it came into Miss Fleming's hands.

The night before she left she was pressing me to sing. I told her, as I had often done before, that I was no singer.

"Uncle says, 'Learn young, learn fair,' "she rejoined.

"But most of the songs I know are for ladies," I objected. "Why not write one for yourself?" she asked promptly. Next morning as I was bidding her good-bye I handed her

Next morning as I was bidding her good-bye I handed her the verses. She was delighted, mainly, I fear, because she thought she was the inspiration. They had been written long before; indeed, it was the first verse, though in a simpler form, that had so interested the great professor. As I say, Nina did not suspect this, nor did I tell her. She was so fond of the words that she declared she should have them set to music. The curious chance that has given them their vogue as a love-song I will mention at the proper time. Meanwhile, here is the song; in some version it will be known to many readers.

#### THREE MOMENTS

Three moments, fraught with rapture wild, Abide in memory: When I, an inland-nurtured child, First saw the open sea;

And when I left the solitude
Where only lapwings wail,
And waited in a Wiltshire wood
To hear the nightingale:

And when, like any wildered bird The storm bath drifted down, I lighted in the Strand and heard The roar of London town.

But deeper, sweet, within my breast
Doth that fond moment dwell
When first thy love-lit eyes confessed
What never lips would tell.

# CHAPTER XVIII

ISS FLEMING'S father was a banker in Aletown, a place nearly as big as Craigkenneth, six miles further down the river and on the opposite, that is, the north shore. I had promised to spend a night there before the young lady should return to Leipsic. The day of my visit Mr. Meiklejohn let me off in good time, and suggested that, instead of cycling in to Craigkenneth and waiting on a train, I should ride down through the flat carse country till I was opposite Aletown, and then cross by the ferry-boat. My directions had been so minute that I found the banker's house without once needing to inquire. Nina was on the lookout and met me in the hall with hearty frankness. Her mother next appeared, a lady favouring her sister at Parkend, though not so short or plump or dark. But the daughter next Nina, little Tib, was as like her aunt as a girl of sixteen can be like a woman of sixty. She even had the lisp, and very droll was its effect when she would make a startling remark with the most innocent air. Nina took me up to the library, a cosy little room at the back, to see her father. Though called the library, it had only one bookcase and that was small; the books, I afterwards learned, were Mr. Fleming's own favourites. The banker was sitting in a round redleather chair, reading and smoking. He was a tall man of strong, heavy make, brown-haired, blue-eyed. When a few words had passed he indicated the volume in his hand, Latterday Pamphlets.

"I was having a look at old Thomas," he remarked.

I had already noticed that one whole shelf and part of another were filled with the familiar brown-and-gilt octavos.

"Is he a favourite of yours?" I asked, surprised at such a predilection in a business man, above all, a banker,

"Yes. I take a spell at him whenever I have an hour. Do you like him?"

I had tried Sartor Resartus a good while ago, I told him,

but had stuck in the first part.

"That's hardly the book to start with," the banker said. "You should begin with some of the plainer works, the *Life of John Sterling*, for instance. Once you got acquainted with him, you would want to know more of him."

"Mr. Bryce's favourite reading is poetry," Nina observed;

and she glanced at me with a meaning smile.

"Indeed!" said her father. "Old Thomas tried hard to write poetry, but he was too rugged. Though in the wee bits that he did hammer out there's the real stuff," and he quoted with effect:

"' The night is gathering on the waste;

Loud through the storm the herdsman calls,

As homeward on my nag I haste

Toward my own four walls.'

"That may not be smooth or pretty," he commented, but it has the true ring. I can imagine myself out on the moorland wilds of the Borders when darkness is coming down. I was brought up on a Dumfriesshire farm, next parish to Carlyle's own; so I can appreciate the truth of his picture. I like a thing to have a grip of reality, whether it's poetry or prose."

To find a literary critic in a banker was another surprise. The rest of the household, too, were interesting. There was a son older than Nina; he was in a branch bank a few miles from Aletown and came home at nights. A younger brother, twin with Tib, was an apprentice-engineer; other children, both boys and girls, were at school; some were too young

even for that.

At dinner the oldest son mentioned that he would not see much of me that evening; he had to attend a music-practice; the local amateurs were to perform *The Grand Duchess* that winter.

In the talk that followed I chanced to say I had seen Carmen in Glasgow a few weeks before, with a noted singer as heroine.

"Ah!" said Nina, with a tragedy air and a sweeping wave of the arm, "that will be my rôle when I go on the stage," and she glanced archly first at me, then at her mother.

"I hope you'll find a worthier calling," Mrs. Fleming said with a pained expression.

"Mamma thinks Nina 'll have to appear in tights," lisped

little Tib.

The young folk laughed, but Mrs. Fleming said reprovingly, "Don't say such things, Tib. Your papa and I think it nothing to joke about."

The children were all musical, those at least who were old enough to have the taste. Tibbie played the violin, the

apprentice-engineer the flute. All of them sang.

Weekly after this, though Nina was off to far-away Saxony, I made a run to Aletown. The older boys and girls were a real orchestra, and in the pauses of the music their father and I talked about books. At his suggestion I tried Carlyle again, and I became a prime favourite with the banker when I told him how I admired his hero's works for their dramatic power, their wealth of allusion. When visiting Aletown, I cycled if the roads were good; at other times I got Meikle-john's pony and stabled it at the ferry-house. Usually I spent the night with the banker and came back the next

morning in time for office-work.

The ferry-house, so familiar in those days, claims a word. It stood a hundred yards or so from the river, and though opposite a populous town, was as lone a dwelling as one could readily find. Originally a farm-steading, it still retained a field for grazing the boatman's cow. The boatman had been forester on a carse estate, and when too old for his own duties had been given this easier place. He was a fine-looking old man, with bright, frank grey eyes and a long broad beard almost white. His big wrists and spreading shoulders told the strength he must have boasted in his prime. He knew me from, I think, the first, certainly the second, visit; indeed, the Lowis land went down to within half a mile of the ferry and he may have seen me about. I had the feeling even that he knew the attraction at Aletown; how he knew, I cannot tell; in the country news spreads through the air. The old man was a philosopher and loved to have a listener. Usually as we crossed, I taking the oars, he had some topic to pass judgment on. It was on my third visit, I think, that he remarked,

"The estate will improve since the dairy scheme has been initiated." He was fond of sounding words. "It will attract

a superior class of tenants,"

I assented, and he went on,

"Yes. A factor has a great deal to do with the prosperity of an estate. A good factor is a boon to the community."

I had to smile, not at the sentiment, which was quite my own, but at the expression. "A boon to the community" was evidently a catchword of old Mitchell's; he had used it once before when I was crossing. I repeated it at the banker's, and for many a week afterwards little Tibbie lisped "a boon

to the community" at every chance.

My experience was now long enough and wide enough to tell me that the community did not always appreciate the boon. Well as I thought of myself, I was becoming aware that the Lowis tenantry regarded me much as rats must regard a weasel. They, too, had reason. If my foresight and energy were enhancing the value of the estate, I did not mean that the surplus should go to the farmers. Nor did Meiklejohn. Nor did the admiral. It was clearly, if tacitly, understood that the gain was to be the landlord's. At the earliest chance we made this plain. The first lease to fall in after our dairy scheme was started was that of Rullie, a place I passed every time I cycled to the ferry; it was indeed the outmost but one of our farms in that quarter. The tenant would give no more than the old rent and the place was advertised. Strangers, some from great distances, looked it, drawn by the fame of the Milk Supply Company, and when the tenders came in it was found that we could get £35 above the old rent. The outgoing tenant, even, had offered £15, a proof that he feared competition. His family had been so long on the estate that both the admiral and Meiklejohn felt reluctant to turn him out; finally, he had to choose between leaving and paying. The transaction was soon public and other tenants growled. What was the use of making a few more pounds out of the land if they were all to pass to the laird? Every day brought fresh proof that the estate was a battlefield where a host of farmers was faced by the dauntless three. I had an instinct, even, that I was more hated than my superiors. The tenants could not but feel that things had been strung up since my hand got play; they saw that I had more energy and less forbearance than the admiral or his factor. This, however, must be said for me: I would often be made the scapegoat when my friends were as deep in the sin as myself. A community with a grievance is ready to throw the guilt on

underlings. "It's no the laird's daein'; the laird kens naething about it; it's that damned factor," had always been the growl with tenantry, and I guessed ours would go further

now, and curse not the factor but his clerk.

What were my relations with the ploughmen on the estate? Had any fellow-feeling clung about me from the days I had been one of themselves and had shared their work and hardships? That seemed long ago; I had since been raised to another class, and I looked on the labourers with calm indifference. I was quite affable, gave them a careless nod and word in passing; and they responded clownishly or composedly, or, if so minded, did not respond at all, for they were less in my power than their masters. On an occasion like the admiral's treat I made myself busy and, I hoped, agreeable; for the rest of the year I took no more interest in them than in the horses they worked.

In the workers about the house and the Home Farm my interest was keen enough; there lay my duty. Early in my career I made certain discoveries that shocked me. One day in Craigkenneth mart a saddler, who was moving about on the hunt, I suppose, for slow-paying farmers, accosted me:

"So I'm losing your custom, Mr. Bryce?"

"I wasn't aware of that," I said.

"It's the case, then. Edmond is to be the man, it seems."

"How is that?" I asked. "Has your harness not been up to the mark?"

"Harness! haw, haw! It's the commission that wasna

up to the mark."

"The commission! To whom?"

"To the coachman, of coorse."

"Oh, come!" I said, greatly surprised, yet collected enough to see the importance of the secret; "you don't mean

that Ferguson takes tips from tradesmen?"

"Damn it, Mr. Bryce! have I no paid him a' these years? I gied him a shilling in the pound on the admiral's account every time it was settled. I'll not deny it," he added with a laugh. The man had been taking a whisky or two, doubtless to get nerve for dunning his debtors. "A shilling in the pound was the figure. But my gentleman wasna content, and seemingly Edmond can pay mair. I doot it'll have to come oot o' the harness."

That very evening I told Meiklejohn. That gentleman

gave an "Imphm" or two, and when I was done he

said,

"It's not right, certainly; it's far from right, James. But what can we do?" Seeing my surprised look, he explained, "You see, it's done universally; all the servants about a big house take perquisites. Of course, as I say, it's wrong, for the temptation is to accept inferior goods for the sake of the bribe. But we're next to helpless. No doubt we could inform the admiral—maybe he suspects already, maybe he doesn't-and Ferguson would be dismissed. We might prosecute him and punish him, ay, and Philp as well, for there's an Act now against those commissions. What would be the upshot, James? The next man would go the same road, maybe faster. There's not one person in twenty about a big house but does the same as Ferguson, and I'm only thankful that with us having the Home Farm and growing most of the feed for our horses there's the less temptation here. How has your uncle Nicol made his money, think you? I'll tell you, James. Until lately, when he has got rather frail, he did a great deal with hay and corn, supplying gentry for their horses, even buying in what he couldn't grow himself. You'll know that, James, for he was pretty deep in that when you were with him. Well, take Miss Galbraith," a lady who owned a fine mansion on the outskirts of Craigkenneth. "She has no ground about Charterston and needs to buy all her feeding-stuffs. It was your decent old uncle that used to supply her, maybe he supplies her yet. Now, I know for a certainty that he paid Miss Galbraith's coachman sixpence in the pound on all hay, straw, and corn supplied. In other cases the commission was even higher. If the account was over £100 a year, as it always was with Colonel Abercromby, Nicol had to pay a shilling in the pound, the same as our friend Philp."

"That'll mean a big addition to a coachman's wage, between corn-dealer, saddler and maybe coachbuilder as

well."

"Yes, James, even to the smith that shoes the horses. No question of it. He may make his wage half as much again. It's a custom. And the women-servants are as good at it as the men. There's Mrs. Adams "—the housekeeper at Lowis. "It's not our business, certainly; I merely mention it. She'll have commission, either in presents or hard cash, from

grocer, and butcher, and baker, and every tradesman that supplies the house. She'll double her salary that way. Yes, James; the upper servants about a big house are as good at lifting blackmail as Rob Roy MacGregor. I see no help for it. All we can do, James, is to watch that no barefaced stealing goes on. And in some cases, maybe, we can see that the goods supplied are not manifestly inferior."

I made even closer acquaintance with the practice. As I was passing the Steeple in Craigkenneth one afternoon, a young man addressed me by name, apologising for stopping

me. He had a fresh ruddy face and was well dressed.

"I'm Mr. Wingate, the timber-merchant," he explained.

"Oh! you're not the Mr. Wingate I've met."

"No; that would be my brother. He's away now and I'm carrying on the business."

Now that the relationship was mentioned I did see a family

likeness.

"I wanted to speak with you for a minute on business. Would you mind stepping over?" and he indicated the Grapes.

I excused myself.

"All right, then; I won't keep you a minute;" and he sauntered on with me. "I merely wanted a word with you about the timber that's advertised."

" Yes?"

"I meant to offer for the larch lot."
"Well, offers must be in by the 31st."

"Yes, I know. But I was anxious to have your good word." When I looked at him questioningly, he proceeded, "Of course, I'll make it worth your while. I'll see to that."

I began to comprehend and I could not repress a smile.

To draw him out I said,

"I don't see how I could help you. The offers are to be sent in sealed."

"Quite so. But here's the point. Will Admiral Seton be at the opening of the tenders?"

"It's hardly likely. He's abroad at present."

"And the offers are to be addressed to Mr. Meiklejohn; so that the lawyers have nothing to do with them, I take it?"

" Nothing at all."

"So it's you and the factor."
"Yes; the factor and I."

"Then it's quite simple. Nobody but you and Mr. Meiklejohn will know what the other firms offer. I name a figure that leaves me a decent margin, and though some other man goes more you give the timber to me and I'll pay you something handsome out of the difference. Of course, Mr. Meiklejohn will have to be squared as well; but you could do that, or let me know how I could best approach him."

"Look here," I said. "Is there much of this in your line

of business?"

"Much of it! I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Bryce, nothing can be done without it. There's hardly a tree bought up and down the country but the factor, and often the forester, has to be bought first. I'll tell you something: it's on that very account I'm managing the business. My brother—the one you've met—tried to run it on honest lines, gave in a fair offer for wood and took his chance. What was the result? He couldn't buy a stick latterly, and the timber was going to men that he knew for a certainty weren't giving anything like his figure."

"What became of your brother?"

"He's away abroad; went to California. He was far too simple for this country."

"And how is he succeeding in California? Is there no

'squaring' there?"

"He hasn't gone into the timber-trade; in fact, he hasn't gone in for anything yet-he's just looking about and talks of buying a bit of land somewhere."

"Well," I said, not trying to hide my amusement, "if he didn't know how to square his men, his brother won't stick

through the same fault."

The youth tried to laugh, though he evidently did not relish

the banter.

"What can one do, Mr. Bryce? I don't say it's a nice way to do business; it would be better to name a figure and take your chance. But if other men try dodges, you must do the same or get left."

"I don't think you'll get left;" and I laughed outright.
"However, it won't succeed in this case."

"How's that?"

"For two reasons. One is that Mr. Meiklejohn isn't a factor who countenances those dodges."

"That's all right;" and he half-closed his eyes and nodded

his head. "Let me get at him and I'll show you different."

"I think you're mistaken; indeed, I'm sure you are. But,

independently of that, I don't take tips myself."

"Look here," and the young fellow took me by the arm; "it'll be something handsome. I'm not the man to stick for a pound or two."

"That's enough," I said, with a manner he could not mistake. "Send in your offer if you like, but let's have no more

of this."

"I say, Mr. Bryce," and he took a step after me; "you won't give me away?"

"I won't hurt you—this time. Send in your offer and take

your chance with the rest."

I merely did my friend justice in defending him to the enterprising timber-dealer. Meiklejohn was above such trafficking. He had ways, certainly, of eking out his salary. Often he was called in as thirdsman in agricultural disputes. Then he did a great deal in valuing land, crop, and stock. This was all done openly, and was calculated to recommend him to the admiral, who would see that his factor was a recognised authority in his own sphere.

### CHAPTER XIX

LD NICOL—my "uncle," as I had to call him now—had been failing; an ulcer was understood to be gnawing his stomach. I rarely went near him, for my Aletown friends attracted me on spare evenings, and when Meiklejohn visited the Mailing he was left to go alone. Sometimes he did not see Pate's wife; twice he found her tipsy. After one of his visits the factor assured me that I was well provided for; he had Nicol's own word.

The day my uncle died was a Thursday, a Craigkenneth market-day. I remember it for more things than one. The morning had brought me a sweet letter from Leipsic. I could only glance it over at the moment, for I was due in Craigkenneth before eleven and there was office business to attend to. So I laid the dear note in my breast-pocket and promised myself the treat of reading it again at my leisure and dwelling

on every word.

Meiklejohn often sent me to the mart in his place, and I liked the errand. It was pleasant to saunter about the pens and rings, a cigarette between my teeth, to give a knowing glance at the sheep and cattle, nod affably to our own tenants, stand and chat with some well-attired factor or laird. Important, too, it made one feel to mount beside the salesman as our big sleek beasts were driven in and to note how the buyers gazed at them with eager interest, then glanced to each other and gave their heads a serious shake. It was all an acknowledgment that we knew how to handle stock.

"Aha! here we are, gentlemen! From Lowis House, from the admiral's Home Farm. Ah! a model. How much to start me? What do you say, Harry? Twenty-four? Twenty-three? Twenty? Eighteen? Eighteen, I'm bid;

five, ten," and so on, as the bodes came thick.

The four beasts we had in that day fetched top prices and

I came down from the salesman's box well pleased. Then I recollected the letter in my breast-pocket. Business was all over; it was time for enjoyment. Leaving the ring where the auctioneer's voice dominated the hum of the buyers, I strolled through the pens where sheep were bleating, cattle roaring, and bullock-wallopers slashing and cursing, and in a quiet corner of the yard near the loading-bank I sat down on

a bar-flake to enjoy the dear letter.

Nina told me how busy she was with her harmony and practising, what special music she had been hearing at Easter, and so on. For all her working she was wearying a good deal. Wasn't it strange? She had never wearied before. She felt she could not hold out till the summer term closed, so her aunt and she had been exchanging letters and had concocted a rare plan. Suppose she came through at the Pentecost recess? Not home, only as far as London. Her mamma and auntie could meet her there and have a week in London together, as they had had before. Her papa didn't care for travelling, and her uncle might not be free, but auntie was sure that Mr. Bryce would be quite willing to accompany the ladies and take care of them. Then, about another thing. Herr Lobstein, who had kept my song for some months, had at last composed an air that satisfied him. She liked it too, and hoped I should. She enclosed a copy of the air with her love.

It seemed to me that I had never felt so exalted as I was that day. Such moods come to us at times, how it is not easy to tell. The season helps to bring them, maybe. That was one of the sweetest April days, with a soft fresh breeze and open sky, the air so clear that as I glanced towards the Ogle hillsides I could have counted every scar. All else conspired to my exaltation; my business at the mart carried through so well, and now this message, so flattering, so tender! I felt as if all was well with me, as if the world was mine. The feeling stayed through the afternoon, and was as strong as ever while I drove up the Lang Stracht. At Cambuslochan gate Mrs. Ralston was waiting to tell me my uncle was dead.

He had been out the day before and had seemed no frailer than usual. At the funeral Big Pate and I were chief mourners. Meiklejohn accompanied me back to the Mailing and heard the will read by a clerk from the office of the Craigkenneth writer who had managed the old man's affairs.

"This is the last Will and Testament of me, Nicholas Gow

farmer, of Abbot's Mailing, in the Parish of Lucas and County

of Craigkenneth; and I hereby revoke," &c.

As the clerk was reading, I happened to glance at my fellow-mourners, and though I was interested enough in what was to come I was forced to smile. Two strangers, who counted kin to my old uncle, one an elderly farmer from about Ayr, the other a shopkeeper from Edinburgh, were glowering at the reader as if life depended on his words. Pate's wife had her usual oily smile; Pate's face wore an expression that seemed queer at the moment but was soon interpreted.

"My shares in the Commercial Bank," read the clerk, "I leave to Barbara Norrie or Mackinlay, wife of my nephew Peter Mackinlay, and presently residing at Abbot's Mailing, absolutely and for her own sole use and benefit, and in acknowledgment of the care she has taken of my household

affairs and of myself."

As if our heads had been worked by the same wire, they all turned slowly to let our eyes rest on the fortunate lady. She glanced back at us, taking us in order, and I thought her

smile was oilier than ever.

"All other money possessed by me or due to me at the time of my death I leave to my nephew, Peter Mackinlay, absolutely. My property and goods at Abbot's Mailing and elsewhere, the stock, crop and implements of the farm, household effects and all belongings of every description, I leave to the said Peter Mackinlay. And I appoint the said Peter Mackinlay and Barbara, his wife, joint executors of this my will."

When the reading was over, we all relieved our lungs with a long breath. For some seconds there was silence; then

Meiklejohn asked,

"What did you say was the date of the will?"

"The 20th December," said the clerk, referring to the document.

The factor looked puzzled and I knew why he had put the

question.

The farmer and shopkeeper exchanged a whisper and sniffed disdainfully. Pate's wife was smiling as usual, but Big Pate himself glowered straight at me, hate and triumph in his black eyes.

"I can't understand you at all," Mr. Meiklejohn said as we walked towards Parkend. "That will is dated the 20th

December. Now, it was a while after that that your uncle

assured me you were provided for, wasn't it?"

"Yes; it was only a month or two since. Let's see. You told me one morning after I got back from Aletown, and it wasn't one of my first visits. It can't be over two months since."

"That's about what I thought. Now, what could Nicol mean by saying two months ago that he had put things right for you when this will, made in December, that's two months before, was standing?"

As I said nothing, he suggested an answer himself. "Don't you think he must have made a later will?"

"No," I said unhesitatingly; "my opinion is, he was simply telling you a lie."

"What could be his motive, James?"

" Just to keep us off him, to keep us from pressing him."

"Then you think-"

"That the woman had got him completely in her power.

I had a feeling the first night I saw her that she would."

"Well, James," said the factor deliberatively, "that was partly my mind too, and I'm not sure but I said as much to you. Still, I'm not satisfied. I'll speak to Sawers "-this was the admiral's agent in Craigkenneth-" and if a later will

was made we may find it yet."

Avarice was not one of my failings, and the loss of my uncle's money would never in itself have given me a regret. But the money had gone to Big Pate. Since I entered the admiral's service, my hate towards my brutal tyrant had not been active. I had been successful, I had pleasant interests to distract me; to be above Pate, to have him partly in my power, had been satisfaction enough. Now he was triumphing. His past cruelty came to mind and I swore vengeance. I did not tell Meiklejohn; I told nobody. Better even, 1 felt, to hide my designs from Pate himself. So when Meiklejohn mentioned that Pate proposed to carry on his uncle's holding, I said there was no reason why he should not.

"Well, that's my feeling too," my friend said. "The admiral may as well have a slice of the four thousand as

another laird."

Old Nicol's estate had been published at this figure. "Only," the factor went on, "he won't get it at the old rent. It's worth three shillings an acre more." "Half a crown, anyway," I suggested, anxious to keep my

enemy on the estate.

I was in Meiklejohn's room when Big Pate came down to the office to give his decision. The lease was ready, though it was not yet signed by the admiral.

"I've been thinkin' ower it," said Pate, "and I'm prepared to gie the rent; but on condition that ye mak' big alterations."

"You spoke of alterations, but not big ones. What do you

want done altogether?"

"Weel, aboot the enlairgement o' the byre-"

"It'll be enlarged whenever you like. You spoke of keeping half a dozen more cows."

"Ay, but—but I've been thinkin' ye micht as weel provide for a dizzen when ye're at it. It'll be a' ae daein'."

"That'll cost something like £350."

"Ay, but look at the big addition to the rent."

"You'll get the byre enlarged to hold a dozen cows whenever you say the word," the factor assured him.

"Weel," Pate was beginning in a complacent tone, when

my friend interrupted him,

"Of course, you pay interest on the outlay." The other merely stared, and Meiklejohn continued, "It's five per cent. on all building alterations."

"Five per cent.!" Pate roared. "My uncle never paid a penny, and the maist o' the steading was rebuilt bit by bit

in his time."

"Things are changed now. This rule has been in force for the last two years and four tenants have come under it already. So you'll be no worse off than your neighbours. Lowis farmers can well afford to pay interest, and the admiral doesn't get money to build with for nothing."

"But he's gettin' a big rise in rent."

"That's because tenants are thriving, thanks to the Supply Company."

"Î canna do 't," Pate growled.

"All right. We must try and find somebody that can."

"I would do a fair thing; I would pay the interest or gie the rise o' rent, but I'll no dae baith."

"That's settled, then; we'll advertise the place."

Afraid as I was of letting my enemy slip, I could not see a chance to interfere. He caught me watching him and probably misread my looks.

"I'll think ower it; I canna dae 't the noo, that's certain."

"Well, we can't give you long, for it's time the place was in the papers. I may tell you that I've been approached already by intending offerers, and I don't look for much trouble in getting it let."

The man was in great perplexity. He had risen and was standing near the door. After the factor had spoken, he stood a little gnawing his under-lip, then without a word he flung himself into the chair at the desk and clumsily signed his name. The fear of letting another man in may have been the strongest motive in deciding him. I could not repress a smile when he was passing out, and he answered it with a scowl that should have blasted me on the spot.

"That's settled, then," my friend remarked when we had the room to ourselves. "I'm only afraid he'll be little credit

to the estate, and his wife still less."

He was not out in his forecast. As soon as he entered on the tack, Big Pate gave up working his pair and engaged a married ploughman, making him first man. The single ploughman might be chagrined at having a stranger brought in over his head; at all events, a wild row broke out the first time the Big Mill visited the Mailing. The second man was building the straw and Pate, who was touched with drink, found fault with his work. The man spoke back; Pate ordered him down and put his mate in his place. Whereupon the ploughman with loud curses told him to get somebody else to work his horses as well. He thought, no doubt, to embarrass the farmer by throwing up his work on a throng day. As it happened, there were plenty of hands about and the Mill went on without a stop. This would not improve the ploughman's temper. He had kept hanging about the yard, assailing Pate from time to time with demands for his fee; Pate replied with gibes, blows followed, and the ploughman, no match for his heavy antagonist, came in for a hammering. He complained to the police and Pate was tried at Craigkenneth Sheriff Court for assault. The mill-men and farmhands—all interested in keeping well with the farmer—swore that the ploughman was the aggressor; his master had only defended himself. The court took their story and acquitted Pate. Next, the man sued him in the civil court for the part of his fee-some £2-due on his leaving. Pate resisted the claim and raised a counter-action for £3—the loss his servant

had caused him by breaking his engagement. The sheriff decided that, even though the farmer might have been unreasonable in his fault-finding, that did not justify the ploughman, who had a six-months' engagement, in throwing up his place summarily. He must lose the £2. In the second action the sheriff found that the farmer might easily have sustained loss from his servant's conduct; as it was, however, he had not suffered, and seeing he had received two weeks' work from his man without pay he need get no further award. The ploughman was cast in expenses for both sides.

It was a complete victory for Pate. No one could feel for the loser like me, for no one had suffered so much from the same tyrant. For a steady, capable workman to be affronted by a half-drunk ruffian would have fired the coldest blood. I grew keener yet for vengeance. Once I had my chance, I should be found more dangerous than the unlucky ploughman. And I knew my chance would come. The villain was reckless, and I was so placed that I could watch him narrowly.

A thing fell out not long after that won him no favour from the estate authorities. On the roadside, halfway between the Mailing and Parkend, stood a double cottage, the one half occupied by Pate's married ploughman, the other by old Davie Anderson, who had once been cattleman on different farms in the neighbourhood and was still fit for odd jobs. His wife and he lived alone, and were understood to have a little money; the family was married and away long ago. When Big Pate increased his dairy stock, old Anderson was employed in the byre till a second maid could be secured. One morning an under-keeper found him in a field near the Mailing with a big hare badly concealed beneath his coat. The keeper felt sure it had been snared, though the snare was not found. For old acquaintance' sake-for I had known the couple in my Mailing days-I should have stopped the case had Big Pate asked the favour from myself or Meiklejohn, and I could have done this the more safely that the admiral was in the south. Pate did nothing; we let the case go on and old Anderson was fined. He was kept on at the Mailing -a thing I was glad of, for I did not want him doubly punished; still, the admiral would not feel beholden to Pate for harbouring a poacher.

## CHAPTER XX

FIKLEJOHN had written the admiral that I was coming to London in May for a holiday, and could wait upon him and report of estate affairs. I had been in London once before with Meiklejohn; it was another thing to be there with my sweetheart. And though she had often seen London on her way to and from Saxony, she confessed no visit had been so pleasant as this. The third day of my sojourn I had to lunch with the admiral. As usual, he was concerned about the pheasants and I could give him little satisfaction. Nisbet, the keeper, had told me that birds were scarce, especially in the coverts towards Lucas.

"They'll never get justice there," the admiral said in a tone of great vexation; "no birds can thrive that are disturbed so much. It's the more annoying because, if the path was done away with, there isn't a preserve to beat it in the

county."

"You should just close it, sir," I suggested.

"So I would, James, most readily, only it's impossible."
"I don't think so, sir," I represented; "the people that use it are people in the neighbourhood, Lucas folk mostly. They couldn't oppose you, for they're nearly all your own tenants or workers to your tenants."

The admiral gave a hopeless smile.

"I know all that, James; I've thought of all that a hundred times; but in these Radical days the public make a great to-do about such a thing as the closing of a right-of-way."

"You could give them something instead," I suggested. "Build a reading-room or hall? I should be most willing,

James; perfectly delighted."

"Or give them a piece of ground for football?"

"With the greatest pleasure, James. That's a still better idea."

"Say that field of Auld's at the foot of the Lang Stracht. There'll be a break in Auld's lease next year, so it would only be a year's compensation you would have to pay. He keeps it always in grass, at any rate; the Lucas people walk over it so much."

"I would make them a present of it to-morrow if they would stop using the path. But how would you close it, James?"

"Just claim the path as private, sir, and offer them the

football field at the same time."

"Well, James," the admiral said seriously, "it's worth trying. I'll incur some odium, but I'll risk that. Lowis will never be a place so long as the public can tramp through the finest corner."

"Then should we wait till the football field is ready for them?"

The admiral reflected a little.

"No," he said with decision. "Go ahead at once. You can let it be known that the field will be given them. If they

behave themselves, they'll have it all the sooner."

The Setons were very attentive to Mrs. Meiklejohn and her relatives, and one night we all had to visit the opera as their guests. The invitation was given for Nina's pleasure especially. Miss Maymie and her husband, who had not yet been in town that season, were expected now and would be at the opera; indeed, the marchioness, so her parents assured us, was quite eager to see her old friends. I had often looked forward to meeting the marquis, whose face had interested, rather fascinated, me long ago. Before his marriage he had been much about Lowis; but, though I was then in the office and saw him often, we were still strangers. Miss Maymie had made frequent stays at Lowis since; her husband had not accompanied her once. This could not be owing to family differences, however, for the admiral and he were known to be intimate friends. On the opera night Admiral Seton came round for us in his motor. He was alone, and on the way he mentioned that his daughter and her husband had been detained in the country. Nina rallied me afterwards about the long face I pulled, and she laughed incredulously when I tried to assure her that it was only the marquis I had been anxious to see.

When I reached home and gave Meiklejohn the instructions

about the right-of-way, he shook his head.

"It's awful what lengths a notion will drive a man once it fills his head. It's like the steam in a railway-engine. folk do no damage to speak of, and there's no question that to shut up the road will cause a lot of bad feeling; it'll make the admiral very unpopular."

"He's prepared for that; he said he was ready to incur any amount of odium for the sake of his dear pheasants."

"Confound the pheasants! And it'll make us disliked as

well."

"What can we do?" I demanded. I was impatient to begin and I cared nothing for consequences. "The admiral wants the road closed at once, and I suppose we've nothing for it but to carry out his wishes."

The factor walked about in uneasy reflection.

"I'll write him," he said at last, "and let him see the trouble he's bringing on himself."

"That won't have much effect, I doubt."

"I'll try to stave him off for the time anyway, and that'll

always give him a chance to reflect."

I heard Meiklejohn dictating the letter next morning, and he showed it me ere it was dispatched. He did not withstand the admiral on the main point; only he suggested delay. In the dead season the path might be closed and few would notice the change; when next summer came round and the villagers thought of using it, they would find it harder to establish a right that had been in abevance for months.

Meiklejohn could handle his employer; the reply came that

we might wait till summer was past.

So the path was left open for the time, though I believed it might have been closed with little opposition. It is almost impossible to overestimate a landowner's power. Outsiders imagine it is curtailed in these democratic days; I knew otherwise. The landowner has the farmers in his grip, and they are aware of it and grovel before him. Through them he controls the ploughmen. The villagers as well are in his hands; they work for him or his tenants, they occupy houses owned by him or his dependants. Even the better-class residents, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the shopkeeper, dare not oppose the laird; a word from him or his factor and their custom would be gone. More than that. I was yet to learn that his influence stretched far beyond his own lands. Meanwhile it was pleasant to rule as the laird's deputy, and since the admiral now lived so much in the south, Meiklejohn and I

had this gratification for months at a time.

Yet that all was not well was discovered to me by a trifling chance. My visits to Aletown were frequent that summer, for Nina was home. She talked of going back to Leipsic no more. Her parents were delighted, and showed by their increasing kindness that I was believed to be responsible for the welcome decision. Nina and I had certainly drawn very close, considering our short acquaintance and our rare meetings. Soon we called each other by our first names, even openly. A little longer and we found ourselves kissing, at first only when we met and parted, but soon at every chance. There was no talk of an engagement, no need of it even; we both seemed to take it as natural that we should belong to one another.

With her father I had grown very friendly. His solid character drew me and he appeared to like my company. In one way I must have made myself interesting to him. I knew his favourite author by this time almost as well as he did himself, and whole paragraphs from the idyllic Sartor or the lurid Revolution would burst from me spontaneously, and not always quite relevantly when we were together. The home was so pleasant, then, that I sought it more than ever, especially when the sweet summer-time made the trip a pleasure in itself. On a soft mellow harvest evening I chanced to be crossing the ferry. Old Mitchell was so crippled with rheumatism that he could hardly put his leg over the gunwale. He had been consulting an Aletown doctor, but had got no relief and little cheer.

"Eh, Mr. Bryce," he said, half-laughing, half-groaning, "if anybody had told me once on a day that I would come to this, I would never have believed him."

"It's a good thing we don't know what's before us," I remarked lightly; "I suppose we wouldn't face it."

"Man, that's something like an observation that Doctor Burdon made to me yesterday. Some friend of his had put a question to him, and he put it to me. He asked if I would be willing to live my life over again, supposing I had the offer. What would be your answer, Mr. Bryce?"
"Do you mean," I inquired, "should I be willing to live

it over again if I were allowed to start with all the knowledge and experience I have gained, so that I could avoid the troubles

of the past and order my course differently?"

The old man smiled. "No, no. We would all be prepared to chance it on those conditions. The doctor meant, would I be willing to live my life over again just as I have lived it the first time, just going through everything I have gone through up to the present moment? What do you say, Mr. Bryce?"

"Not on any account," and in my earnestness I stayed the oars till the boat began to drift with the ebbing tide; "not for millions; not though I were to get the whole world

to-morrow."

"Ay, man," and the old man was evidently interested; and yet you've had a prosperous career."

"Not for worlds," I repeated; "not though the whole

universe were promised me the next moment."

"I'm rather surprised——" old Mitchell began.

"Well, what did you answer yourself?" I interrupted.

"I said, No."

"There, you see!"

"Ay, but there's a vast difference between the two of us, Mr. Bryce. You have had a successful career so far, and you're young still; there's no prophesying what you may attain to; you may reach the highest pinnacle. But I'm old and done, with nothing to look forward to, and I'm as poor to-day as when I was your age."

I shook my head meaningly. "We all have our troubles, and what may seem light to you may be unbearable to me, just as I might think little of your grievances. When I recall some half-hours in my past life, the dark things before me and no way out that I could see, I wouldn't face it again, not

for the universe."

"Ay, ay," said old Mitchell; "man, I wouldn't have expected that."

"What did the doctor say himself?" I inquired.

"He said No, too."

"I thought so. And what did his friend say?"

"He said No, like the rest of us."

I shook my head once more.

"It strikes me that's the common answer you'll get."
The question haunted me as I walked up to the Bank

House. It made me uncomfortable, though why I could not tell and did not wish to know. So disquieting was it that I tried to put it from my thoughts, and I did not mention it to Mr. Fleming, whom it would certainly have interested.

#### CHAPTER XXI

RS. SETON and her elder daughter came north in August; the admiral spent most of the season in Wiltshire and paid us only few and short visits. At every visit he mentioned the right-of-way, and at last gave orders that it should be closed ere the pheasant-shooting.

"Nothing else for it, James," the factor reported with a deep sigh. "He's been set on this for twenty years and more, and I suppose nothing will stop him now. You can see about shutting it up, James, if you don't mind; I've no heart for

it."

The task was anything but ungrateful to me. By the last week of September a board was up at either end of the path:

#### PRIVATE.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.

A short paling was erected and liberally laced with barbed wire.

"It's a mistake your people are making," Mr. Ralston said one night I was down having a rubber with himself, his wife, and a lady-friend.

"Why do you think so?" I inquired.

"Because, to begin with, the admiral has no right to stop the road. It has been open for generations, and that he knows as well as anybody."

I laughed. "All the easier, then, for the public to assert

their right."

"I don't know that. The local people won't venture to oppose him, they daren't; and outsiders may not be interested enough. It's unjust, all the same." When I only smiled, he went on with more heat, "I was up there last Sunday and was stopped by a barbed-wire fence. That was the first intimation I had that the right-of-way was interfered with. I didn't like it. A road I've used almost every Sunday of my life!"

"You know perfectly well, Mr. Ralston, the fence is not meant to stop the like of you. You're welcome to stroll over

the whole estate."

"That's well enough, but I don't care to have as a privilege

what is really a right."

"It'll be to your advantage to have people kept away. There won't be so many loafers strolling past on a Sunday and trespassing on your—"

"They never did me any harm."

"I've seen them pulling your turnips and have checked

them myself."

"That's nothing," and, nettled perhaps by my flippancy, he added in a determined tone, "I wouldn't have let it pass if my hands hadn't been so full. The admiral may get his way, certainly, but it'll do him no good in the countryside. The public feel such an encroachment, and don't forget it in a hurry."

"They don't appear to care a straw, Mr. Ralston. The fence has been up now for three weeks and you're the first

I've heard make a complaint."

It was only a few days later that the admiral came through for the first big shoot of the pheasant-season. He was delighted to know that his long-desired aim had been attained without trouble.

There was a scarcity of beaters at the first shoot, and on the eve of the second, at two days' interval, Dewar, one of the under-keepers, happening to meet me near Parkend, where I had been with a message after closing-time, mentioned that there might be the same inconvenience again. I was anxious that the day should be successful. The admiral was having a large party; still more, I had been invited. As we stood on the road, casting about for names, the keeper said,

"There's old Anderson," and he nodded in the direction of

the cottage; "he's doing nothing now."

"He would do first-rate."

"Yes," and the keeper gave a laugh; "only he mightn't come at my asking; he'll have a grudge about that hare."

"I had forgotten that. Well, if you see those others, I'll arrange about Anderson. I may as well look him up just now when I'm passing anyway."

We parted, and I strolled along to the cottage.

It was a fine mid-autumn evening, and the hush that accompanies the sunsetting was on all the countryside. that season of my life the hour often brought a dowie feeling, in spite of my youth and vigour and fair prospects; why, I did not ask, and perhaps could not have discovered. This evening, I remember, there was no melancholy in my mood; I walked with springy step, thinking with eagerness and pride of the morrow's sport. Soon I was at the cottage which old Anderson and his wife shared with the married ploughman of the Mailing. It stood bare to the road, with no fence or green in front, though at the back was a garden enclosed by a well-kept thorn-hedge, in one corner of which was a holly-tree trimmed pagoda-fashion. The Mailing ploughman had a swarm of young children, yet his home, like his neighbours', was only a but-and-ben. As I recall it now, the place seems to me the barest and humblest of roadside dwellings; in those days I gave it no heed, and certainly on this autumn night I was not likely to be sentimental over its poverty; my heart was full of my own joyous hopes and dreams. Ere I reached the house I noticed old Davie's wife in the garden handling some towels that lay spread on the hedge; she was gripping them to feel if they were dry. I stood at the end of the cottage and called to her,

"You're busy, Mrs. Anderson. Been a good day for your

washing. Is Davie about?"

"No, he's not," and she paused in her work. She was a tall, thin, delicate woman, well-spoken, reserved, and somewhat superior to her class.

"Is he doing anything just now?" I asked.

The woman responded as before and came forward.

"He would be free to-morrow, then?"

"For anything I know."

"Then you might tell him to come and beat for us. We start from the West Lodge at eight, so he'll see to be there in good time." I turned away, but stopped to repeat, "You'll mind: Mrs. Paterson's lodge, at eight sharp. Of course," I

added, "he'll get the same as the rest—three-and-sixpence and a couple of rabbits, and he may come in for a day or two more later on."

"Just wait a minute, if you're not in all the greater a hurry," and the woman came out to the road where I was now standing. "So you want David to come at your beck, you that did your very best to disgrace him?"

The words were so unlooked for that it was a little ere I

could take them in.

"You mean-" I began.

"I mean, taking him into a court, him that has been a hard-working, well-doing man all his days, and getting him made a byword through the whole countryside, and all for a poor bit hare that anybody might have had for the lifting."

"That's an old story now," I said sharply, though I did

not feel comfortable.

"Not many months old, and if you have most forgotten it we havena. A man and his wife that have kept a clean name for sixty-five years! They don't forget when anybody tries to blacken it."

"But, Mrs. Anderson, your husband knew the consequences. Any other person would have been punished just the same."

"Punished! Do you mean to tell me the admiral would ever have punished him for a thing like that? Fine we know whose doing it was. Never would my man have been disgraced if it hadn't been for you, you upstart puppy."

The woman spoke sharply and determinedly, but did not shout as a vulgar person would have done. Her neighbours, who had looked out of their door, had dodged in again on seeing me, though their heads appeared at times at the window. This I only saw as in a dream, for the fierce sudden onslaught

had driven my wits away.

"It's true, true, what they say about beggars on horseback," she went on. "When the Big House folk took pity on ye, ye were lower than any beggar, and now ye'll let nobody live but yourself. Folk darena walk on the very road; ye must shut up a place that's been free and open as long as the oldest can mind. We need nobody to tell us who's at the bottom of those low tricks. There wasn't a body on the estate fined for meddling with game since I lived on it, and only twice have strangers been punished that I mind of, and both times it was really because they abused the keepers. And as for

shutting up a road, neither the admiral nor his factor ever thought of it, though they've been here the best part of their days. But as soon as you get your foot in the stirrup ye drive decent folk out of your gate like vagabonds. But, mark my words: ye harass poor folk the now, but ye'll just have your day, and few tears 'll be shed when your day's done."

"You've said quite enough," I cried excitedly. "Just

stop or you'll rue it."

"Ay, that means that ye'll slink and crawl till ye get us turned out of our bit house. But we lived before we saw your face and we'll maybe live to see your back. Every dog has its day. But, my certie! I little thought to see you go this gate when ye were lifted from the dunghill. It's not so long since ye were worse used than any dog, and many's the time my man and me were wae for ye when we saw your white begrutten face and thought how ye were buffeted about; but better would it be for you this day, twenty times, ay, a thousand times better, to be still that friendless, ill-used laddie than to be swaggering like my lord with your brown leggings and your riding-whip, and to be getting all this grandeur by grinding the faces of the poor."

I had recovered my senses enough to know that I was no match for the woman at words. I could see the faces of the ploughman's family glued to the window and only ducking when my eye was turned full on them. No need to stand all this humiliation. Could I not walk off when I liked and leave

the woman to rail into space?

"I have something else to do than listen to such talk,"

I said contemptuously and I turned away.

"Yes; ye'll have some dirty trick to play on other folks so as to scrape favour with them ye serve. Ye can go, but ye've got what I've been keeping for months to give ye. And though ye should be struck dead this night, it can ne'er be said that ye died without having your character read to

your face."

Never in my life had I been so enraged. Fury had full possession of me. As I made my way home I saw nothing of the woods, the fields, even the birds. I was still looking at the woman's pale set face and writhing under her merciless tongue. How she had contrived to distort my actions, to give a certain likeness to the hideous portrait she had drawn! What downright lies were some of her charges, that about the

right-of-way for one! The admiral had brooded over the thing for years, Meiklejohn had told me; ay, the admiral had told me himself.

In bed that night I woke after a few hours and the words began stabbing at my heart. I squirmed, wild but helpless. No more sleep, and when I got up I was nervous and shaky as after an illness. When out with the guns I missed everything I fired at. My right-hand neighbour, an officer from the castle, who had grassed every bird, showed his contempt by declining to exchange a word with me in passing between the coverts.

Lunch was to be at the house. As we walked over, Nisbet, the head-keeper, got near enough to ask,

"Have you been duffing them, Mr. Bryce?"

I answered with a gesture of despair.

"Anybody's hand may be out at times," said the keeper, who knew I was passable at a flying shot; "a good stiff whisky 'll steady you."

The men were taking their seats and remarks about the sport were flying when my neighbour from the castle growled

out in a tone to command the attention of all,

"If we had half the birds that were missed, we'd have some-

thing like a bag."

The affront set my face afire, and the torture was that I durst not reply. However, after I had tried Nisbet's specific more than once I felt a different man, and was on the lookout for another insult which even the admiral's presence would not have kept me from resenting. But Captain Stirling was plying the decanter and grew more genial with every glass.

Lunch over, we repaired to the Den. The sight of the barbed-wire fence, fresh and formidable, heartened me as much as the liquor. We lined the bank of Lowis water and faced the wood through which the beaters were slowly forcing a way. Nothing stirred but song-birds till they were nearly through; then half a dozen pheasants rose almost together. As one came straight for me, I let bang, right, left, the whisky swimming in my head so that I fired without an aim. I was yards wide. My right-hand neighbour had not time to greet the failure even with a growl, for he had fired at his mark a second or two after me. To my surprise he had to give it both barrels; to my greater surprise and, I must own, delight, he missed. The rest of the day it was a match between us

which should fire the more wildly. Luck, sheer luck, gave me a hit or two; the captain had not one. I found it was a common saying about him that he never missed a bird before lunch and never hit one after.

Busy as I was with duty and pleasure, Mrs. Anderson's words kept working in my mind like poison. I did not mean to punish her; my vengeance would fall on another. Big Pate had no doubt blackened my conduct in that poaching affair; besides, it was his blame that it went so far; had he interceded for old Anderson, the case would have been stopped. I burned with impatience to glut my hate. The second evening after my encounter with Mrs. Anderson I strolled over to the Laigh Wood, for it had occurred to me that Big Pate, who was hanging some new gates, might be procuring his posts at the admiral's expense. If so, they should be paid dear. There was the spot where he had nearly murdered me for letting the rabbit away. He should suffer yet for that and some more things. Through curiosity I searched for the place where he and Bob had sawn down the oak that afternoon. The stump was quite overgrown with turf, and no stranger could have guessed it was here. Sharply as I examined the planting I found no sign of recent depredation. This disappointed, yet flattered me. Pate was growing cautious.

The admiral was to stay a fortnight, and every day was laid off for sport or some social function. Early in the second week, when the house was still crowded with guests, I was in the office one afternoon and heard a trap drive up. The admiral came in hurriedly and was making for Meiklejohn's

room without a word.

"Mr. Meiklejohn isn't in, sir," I called; "he's down at Moss o' Warnock, at the displenishing sale."

He stood perplexed.

"Will he—you've no notion when he may be back?"

"Not till evening, I should think, sir."

The admiral glanced at the two lads beside me, then he

entered the inner office, beckoning me to follow.

"It's this I wanted to see him about. I'm afraid he'll have to take the chair—in fact, he'll have to take it—at the half-yearly meeting, for I can't stay the week out." His manner, usually so decided, was halting; his face, too, showed he was agitated. "Indeed, James," he went on, "I'm leaving at once, this very evening." I must have looked surprise,

for he explained, "I'm called away, James; very startling news; very serious," and he drew from his side-pocket a telegram.

I glanced at it.

"Come instantly. Edmund has died suddenly.—Maymie."

"You don't mean—— This doesn't mean Lord—the Marquis of Soar?" I stammered.

The admiral shook his head sorrowfully for confirmation. Neither of us spoke for a while. Then the admiral said,

"He hasn't been well lately, not well at all, though he was a man that wouldn't have any fuss made about himself. But his state was far more serious than he can have thought. Indeed, I'm not surprised, James, at the end coming so suddenly—not in the least surprised. I knew his—his illness was —was dangerous."

I got out some words of sympathy which, I daresay, he did

not heed, for he went on,

"So I must go at once; my daughter will need me badly."
"She will indeed, sir. Do you intend travelling by the

evening mail—about six?"

"Yes, if I can manage it."

"Six-twelve it is," I said, looking my pocket-diary.
"You'll have time but no more. Have you wired, sir, to say you were coming?"

"I've had time for nothing yet," and he made a hopeless

gesture.

"No, of course not, sir. Only they'll be anxious."

"I'll wire from Craigkenneth."

"Yes. You'll be sure to remember, sir. They'll be so anxious; the marchioness will be so anxious. Or wait. I could 'phone a message to the Lucas Post office just now and they'll wire it on. Would that do, sir? It would save you all bother at Craigkenneth. Besides, they would have word a little sooner."

"Excellent, James; the very best thing."

I went to the 'phone and gave the message. It was merely that the admiral was leaving with the mail. When he had heard it dispatched, he said,

"I'll start, then, and you'll explain things to Meiklejohn.

He'll do all right for Thursday. Good-bye, James."

"Perhaps you'll find a minute to have a line sent to Mr.

Meiklejohn," I suggested, as we stood at the outer door. "We'll all be anxious to hear how—how they are at the Manor."

"I'll do so, James;" and this time he put out his hand

in bidding me good-bye.

Returning to the inner office, I paced up and down in agitated thought. The marquis dead! The man who had interested me so strangely from the moment I saw him first! Dead, leaving everything, leaving his young wife! Miss Maymie a widow! What changes! What changes! My excitement would not let me stay indoors, so bidding the lads look to the office till closing-time I took my bicycle and rode off for Moss o' Warnock, a farm down the carse. The farmer had lately died, and his widow was selling the stock, crop, and implements. For the first three miles the road was the familiar one to the ferry, but as I swished through mud and rotting leaves, my Aletown sweetheart was almost forgotten; I was thinking of a former queen. The sale was over when I arrived, and buyers were removing their stuff and settling with the clerks. Meiklejohn was in the stackyard, the salesman beside him. The factor glanced at me apprehensively, but he was as much shocked as I had been when I called him aside and gave him the news. We put the bicycle in the dogcart and I sat by my friend talking with him mostly of the Thursday's business, the Supply Company's meeting. Impatient as we both were for more news from Wiltshire, we knew me must wait. There would be something in next morning's paper.

It had a short paragraph, which gave only one item that was new to me: the heir-presumptive to the dukedom was

a half-cousin of the late marquis.

That same morning the lad from Lucas Schoohouse who did our letters brought some printed matter that interested us as much. It was a poster he had torn down from a gate near the village. Copies were going up, he told us, all over the district.

#### "To the Inhabitants of Lucas and Neighbourhood

"FRIENDS,

"An attempt is being made to close the footpath past the Den Wood, which has been a recognised right-of-way from time immemorial. If the attempt is successful, it will no doubt be followed up by other encroachments. You are therefore earnestly requested to gather at the foot of the Lang Stracht on Saturday next at 2 p.m. and march to the Den Wood, where the obstacles will be demolished."

Johnny told us that a man Goodwin was understood to be the author of the handbill. This Goodwin lived in Lucas, but was clerk in a Craigkenneth office. He was a hot Radical, if not a Socialist.

Neither Meiklejohn nor myself appeared on the Saturday. He was at Lord Soar's funeral, and I knew I should not be welcome. Our friends were ready to furnish us with particulars. There was a great crowd, all the villagers and many outsiders. A brass band led the procession up the Stracht, playing inspiriting airs. At the plantation Goodwin harangued the crowd on land-grabbing and landlordism in general. He made some personal references which the Craig-

kenneth paper reported in full:

"He (the speaker) regretted that they had to make a hostile demonstration at a time when Admiral Seton was suffering from a sudden bereavement. Indeed, he regretted that they were involved in a conflict with the admiral at all. The admiral had proved a good enough landlord as landlords went, and certainly in all the years he had been laird he had never tried to violate the rights of the public. But one of the greatest evils of the land-system was that the laird had to keep a dog (laughter) to do the barking (renewed laughter), and the dog often barked even after its master had ordered it to be quiet (cheers). In this case, however, he did not blame even the dog, for the dog had never barked at the public on an open path. But there was a puppy (great laughter and cheering), and this puppy, after snapping at everybody's heels, had now taken up his post on the right-of-way and was yelping to frighten the public. He would let them see just now how such puppies should be dealt with.

"Thereupon," continued the Advertiser, "the speaker shouldered a formidable hatchet and, advancing to the obnoxious barrier, dealt it some hearty strokes which severed the barbed wire. A band of willing helpers then flung themselves on the stobs and, encouraged by the applauding shouts

of the crowd, tore them up and flung them into the burn. The crowd then proceeded to the west end of the path, where the work of demolition was repeated. The Lucas constable and two other members of the county force were present, but did not interfere in any way."

Meiklejohn got the story when he came home the next week. He heard it with many a wise shake of the head,

many a "Yes, I said so," "I'm not surprised."

"They needn't blame you, James," he soothed me by saying, "for the admiral's had his heart set on this ever since I knew him. I wish it may not be the worst business we ever had to handle."

"We can't drop it now," I said.

"We'll have to drop it—in the meantime, at least. admiral has other things to think of, and I'll take no respon-

sibility in the affair."

Speaking of Lord Soar's death, the factor told me that the young widow had borne the stroke bravely; she had even been able to attend the funeral. No doubt, my friend explained, the death was not the surprise to her that it would be to strangers; her husband had not been himself for a while. This was as far as Meiklejohn would venture, afraid, I suppose, that if rumours spread they might be fathered on him. But about a big house nothing can be hid. Ere long, dark stories were abroad, rising, most like, from letters that would come to Lowis maids from their friends in the south. The marquis, so it was whispered, had been peculiar for some time and had been closely watched. During the admiral's absence he was found strangled. There had been no inquest, nothing to raise open scandal; family interest had prevailed so far. It was added, and this was past doubt, that the Daventry house was tainted: the old duke had always been eccentric and was never visible now; a younger brother of the marquis had had a suspicious end. I had an instinct that the tragic story about the young nobleman's fate was true; it explained something that had startled me the night I saw him first.

If Meiklejohn was reticent about Lord Soar's death, he spoke freely enough of his affairs. Besides what was hers by the marriage settlement, her husband's wealth came to the marchioness by will. The large property of Wiston Court in Hamptonshire, which had been at her husband's disposal,

now became hers.

The Setons remained in the south that winter, though a staff of servants was kept at the house. Meiklejohn was often called away to advise the admiral about the Midland property, and I knew that amid these weighty matters our right-of-way dispute had no chance. My enemies paraded their triumph. Not a Sunday passed, even in winter, but groups tramped the path. I had not given up the fight, though I had to keep my tent for the time. Goodwin, I felt, was the dangerous man. The other villagers had merely looked on, though perhaps with sympathy; the active helpers were youths from a distance, and these would lose interest in the affair if their leader were removed. But I saw no way of reaching him. The cottage Goodwin occupied was his own; his employment was in the town, not on the estate. The admiral, when he found time, might start an action for interdict. This would be tedious and costly; above all, it would renew the scandal.

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### CHAPTER XXII

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N a Friday in April—it was the last Friday of the month—I was in Craigkenneth for a round at golf. Sauntering up High Street I noticed a great crowd round the Steeple and I recollected it was the Feeing-Fair. There were the young ploughmen of the shire gathered beneath the Steeple that had looked down on generation after generation of their kind, met as they were to-day. Few girls were on the lookout for fees, though plenty were about the street on holiday. I watched the ploughmen with interest, and noted, as I had done many a time before, their wretched physique. They were mostly puny fellows, with neither height nor girth. The farmers, moving among them and occasionally pouncing on one, were like Tritons seizing minnows. Not many farmers were about, however; it was on in the afternoon and most of the engagements would be made. The throng of ploughmen still left showed that the market had been glutted. As I stood watching them and recalling some I used to be familiar with, a fellow of, say, eight-and-twenty, with fair hair and rather good features, caught my eye and looked as if I should have recognised him. I knew the face, but could not place it at the moment. Soon I recollected the man and nodded. He came forward and gave me the time of day, adding,

"Anything needed in my line, Mr. Bryce?"

The man had been having a glass, else he might not have accosted me. Still, he was sober alongside his mates; many of them could scarcely stand.

I shook my head.

"Our hands are all stopping on. Where have you been

since you left our parts?"

It was the ploughman who had lost the fight and the lawcase to Big Pate. Liddell, I now recollected, was the name. He had been carting in Fallowkirk, he told me. The contractor was bankrupt, and he was trying to get back to farm-service.

"I thought you'd have got a fee easily," I said. "You're

a good all-round man."

"It's that row at the Mailing that's jammed me," he explained.

"You mean that it has made the farmers have a feeling

against you?"

"Ay. They don't like a man that's been in a row."

"I'm sorry," I assured him, "for I know you must have had a lot to stand and the fault was certainly not all on your side."

"By God! ye may say that. If the folks only ken! But then, they dinna. That —— has been nae freen o' mine. And he's nae freen o' yours either, Mr. Bryce."

" No?"

"No. I've heard him misca' ye to the lowest."

I winced, though I should have been prepared for this. "Oh, well," I said as carelessly as I could, "it may do him no good and it won't hurt me."

I was turning away, for I wanted to hear no more of those

unpleasant truths, when a thought flashed on me.

"By-the-by, Liddell, did Mackinlay act on the straight when you were with him? He never took advantage of the laird in any way?"

"You mean poaching?"

This was not my meaning. Still, as it might lead to something, I left the fellow to his mistake.

"I don't know that I've seen him just poachin'. But he

shot hares; I've seen him."

"He has the right, of course, and the admiral doesn't object to his tenants using their right, so long as they do it in moderation."

"Ay, but he hadna the licence."

"The gun-licence, you mean?" I asked.

" Ay."

"We have nothing to do with that. It's the Excise."

"I ken; and I wad hae informed on him, only he's ta'en oot the licence since."

"How do you know?"

"Because I looket the list."

" Where ? "

"In Lucas Post Office. I made an errand in just to mak' sure that he hadna the licence afore I reported him, and dam't if the ——'s name wasna the first my een lichted on. I thocht I was dreamin'."

I had to smile, though not at the fellow's bewilderment. I admired the hate that could inspire such ingenuity and pains.

"So you can't reach him that way?" I asked.

"It seems no. But I'll be even wi' him yet if me and him

lives long enough."

"Well," I said, "I'm sorry you haven't got a fee. If ever you need anybody to speak for you, I'll be very glad if you

refer to me;" and I strolled away.

It was not long till I had a chance of helping him. The first thing Miss Maymie did on coming into the Hamptonshire property was to dismiss the land-steward. His offence I never learned: I inferred it was some old slight. The news came to me one morning through Meiklejohn, who was perusing a letter he had received from the admiral.

"He wants me to find a steward for her ladyship. Can

you suggest anyone, James?"

I had no thought of the post for myself. Both Meiklejohn and the admiral considered me indispensable at Lowis.

"No," I answered, "unless Bob is tired of farming and cares

to try it."

Meiklejohn made a face. "Nice enough fellow, Bob; but rather easy for such a place. And there's another thing, James: the terms are a little peculiar. 'The marchioness means,'" he went on, reading from the admiral's letter, "that he,' the steward, James, 'shall consult you on all important matters and act on your advice."

"That means that he's to be under you?"

"Something like that, I gather."

"In fact, that you're to have charge of Wiston Court very much as you have of Lowis."

"Well, James," said my friend demurely, "it's not ex-

pressly stated, but I daresay it amounts to that."

"You're going ahead," I said laughing. "No sign of the

arm-chair for you yet."

He was gratified, I could see, at the new dignity and I understood the feeling. Here was more honour, more influence, above all, fresh proof of confidence from those he had served so long.

"She doesn't mean that I'm to work for nothing," he remarked in a little, "or indeed any of us," and he returned to the letter: "'My daughter will see that you and your staff don't suffer by the extra work this will entail."

"That's all right," I said, though I admitted that Bob, even if he thought of returning to factor-work, might not care

for the place on the terms.

Meiklejohn did not hurry to make the appointment. He knew that only a rare man would work to satisfaction with him in such a delicate relationship. Meanwhile he had to

run south every other week, and he began to grumble.

After one of those runs he asked if I could suggest anyone as estate-carter for the Court. The last one was disabled with a serious accident, and Meiklejohn thought we had better fill his place with a man we knew. Liddell's name came to my tongue-tip, but I kept it back. To send Liddell south was to remove him from Big Pate's neighbourhood and rob myself of an ally. So I let the factor find a man for himself.

The admiral's long absence left Meiklejohn and myself uncontrolled rulers. That we did not neglect our employer's interests I will now show. Goodwin, the people's champion in the right-of-way dispute, was before the public once more; a Parish Council Election was on and he was standing. In the Craigkenneth paper I noticed him put down as cashier with Laing and Co., a firm of builders.
"That's a mistake, isn't it?" I asked, showing the paper

to Johnny. "He's with Denovan?"

"He used to be; but he got this place at Laing's the other

week."

The news set my wits working and I had soon shaped my plans. Meiklejohn sanctioned them on the understanding

that I should act as for myself.

The first day I was in Craigkenneth I went to the Royal Hotel and sent Laing a message by a hotel servant. The messenger was not to give my name. Had I called at the office Goodwin might have observed me, and in the light of after-events might have read my secret.

Laing soon appeared and, on finding that it was I who had summoned him, looked expectant, as if scenting

orders.

When we had talked a little on the dulness of the building trade I introduced my business.

"What I wanted to see you about, Mr. Laing, is this. The sandpit at Borland will soon be worked out."

This sandpit was on the verge of Lowis estate next Craig-

kenneth. Laing used the sand for building.

"Yes," Laing said; "we're nearly at the hedge."
"So I noticed. And what do you mean to do?"

He looked at me in surprise. "Continue it into the next

field."

"But have you leave to continue it into the next field? So far as I'm aware, your leave only applies to the field

you're in."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Bryce. But it was always understood that we should have leave to work the sand right on. Why, it would jam us entirely. There's no other place near the town."

"We can't help that."

"I don't understand this, Mr. Bryce. We never for a moment thought the admiral would cut the feet from us. I suppose there's somebody else trying to shove us out. I must say—"

"You're quite mistaken. We haven't thought of anybody

else."

"You might let me know, then, what's the matter." As I was in no hurry to speak, he went on, "If it's a question of the royalty, well, we've been giving the usual figure, just what's given in other places round about."

"It's not that at all."

"Well, you might tell me what it is, Mr. Bryce. Upon my

word, I haven't the least notion."

"Well, Mr. Laing," I said, "you can hardly expect the admiral to go out of his way to oblige you. It looks as if you didn't care much for his interests."

"How's that?" he asked in surprise.

"Because you have men in your employ, in important posts, too, who are doing their best to injure him."

"I don't know them, Mr. Bryce."

"Do you mean to say you haven't heard of the Den right-

of-way dispute?"

He reflected a little. "I do remember seeing something about a dispute out your way. That's some months ago, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"But what has that to do with me or my hands?"

"It has this much to do with them, Mr. Laing. The ring-leader is in your office, has been for some weeks."

"You don't mean Goodwin?"

I nodded again.

"Upon my word, Mr. Bryce, I knew nothing about it; or rather, I never thought about it, for I do recollect now seeing Goodwin's name in connection with the affair. But you should remember this, Mr. Bryce: he wasn't in our place then; he was clerk with Denovan."

"I know, and it looks as if you had promoted him by way

of rewarding him."

"Look here, Mr. Bryce. Though this should be the last word I may ever speak, I assure you it never once occurred to me that Goodwin had taken part in the dispute. And I'll soon satisfy you that I don't want him to bother your people. I'll sack him this very day; by Jings! I'll sack him this very minute;" and he got to his feet.

"I don't want him sacked;" and I pointed to the chair the builder had left. When he had sat down again I added,

"Only he'll have to stop bothering us."

"He'll never trouble you more, take my word. If he does, he clears out of this sharp. Of course, I'll take care not to bring your name in or the admiral's name; I'll put some other excuse on to him."

" Just as you like."

"By-the-by, Mr. Bryce," the builder said as he was bidding me good-day, "Goodwin's standing for the Parish Council or something of that sort. I'll stop that if you say the word. Mind you, I was quite willing that he should stand, for, between ourselves, Mr. Bryce, he might have a chance of putting work my way. But just say the word and he withdraws or else clears out of this."

"Not at all. He may be on fifty councils for all I care, so

long as he doesn't bother us."

The next forenoon Laing 'phoned me that he had spoken, and after a night's reflection our friend had given an under-

taking to keep his mouth shut.

So I had a proof that the landowner has a long arm and can reach far beyond his own domains. The town shopkeepers, tradesmen, even professional men, need his custom or his patronage. I should say, indeed, that never in history has his power been greater than it is now, and, except in large cities where the individual is lost in the crowd, the man who would defy him must take his life in his hands. Goodwin had more than himself to think of: he had a wife and children. I felt pretty sure, after my talk with his employer, that he would give the required undertaking and would observe it.

As soon as Laing's message arrived, I gave orders to have

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the stobs and barbed wire restored.

## CHAPTER XXIII

EIKLEJOHN was so often at Wiston Court that he tried to spare himself when at home. "You'll have to see to that, James," he said one morning as we went through the letters. Some rows of houses were going up at Claygate and a new road was necessary. This was a complaint from the neighbouring farmer that the road, as staked off, deviated from the plan and encroached too far on his field. I started before noon and travelled by the south line through the Black Country of Clydesdale. At the junction where I changed I had lunch in a commercial hotel, then made the rest of the journey by a little branch line that terminated at Claygate. It was near three when I landed.

This was my first visit. The country was high, bare moorland, mostly reclaimed and fed down with hill cattle, though the hollows were still mere peat-hags growing nothing but ragged heather. The wealth was below ground.

Close to the station were great ranges of works, all brickbuilt. The black smoke eddying from the stacks told of brisk trade. I entered the pretentious offices, and on asking for Mr. Lyon, the principal of the company, I was shown into a large comfortable room where that gentleman was walking about and dictating a letter to his girl-typist. I had occasionally met him at Lowis and he welcomed me effusively. Mr. Lyon was a tall, robust man of, say, sixty-five, with grey hair and a short, thick beard almost white. He bubbled over with energy; his tongue and his limbs were never still. Diligent in business, he had interests of another kind: he went about the country addressing religious and temperance meetings; he gave money freely to build halls and pay evangelists.

"You're in no hurry back? You'll stay the night?" he

asked, when I had explained my errand and answered his friendly inquiries about the admiral.

I was not sure, I told him; it would depend on how I got

through my work. We were busy at Lowis just now.

Mr. Lyon went to the door and called "William." One of the clerks in the outer office rose. Mr. Lyon introduced us, and told me Mr. Rankin would show me the place there was the dispute over. The clerk, who might be a year or two older than myself, was a smart pleasant-looking fellow, pale, with sharp regular features, black eyes, and a neat black moustache. We set out together.

We passed a long range of kilns, some of them open and showing the glow of the furnaces. Then we went round the end of the railway siding. Young women, clad in petticoats with a wrapper or old jacket for upper garment, were packing trucks and exchanging obscene jokes with passing miners.

On some outbuildings were a few small flags.

"What are the flags for?" I asked my companion.

"They were put up for Mr. Lyon's wedding and haven't

got taken down yet."

I recollected that Mr. Lyon had married for the second time some months before. We passed a joke or two, as young folk will when their elders make fools of themselves, and soon we were chatting freely. Indeed, my new friend proved a

frank communicative guide.

Beyond the works were the workers' dwellings. I had never seen their like. Except two church-like buildings and two schools, they were three-story brick blocks, exactly alike in form and size, and marked "Section I.," Section II." and so on. The place might have been an asylum or soldiers' barracks. No gardens were to be seen, though we came on small open spaces with iron standards here and there. These were washing-greens.

"It's a queer-looking place," I observed to the clerk, and

I remarked on its barrack-like aspect.

"Yes," he assented with a smile; "it's hardly one's notion of a model village."

The houses were wonderfully quiet and as yet we had

scarcely seen an inmate. I commented on this.

Mr. Rankin explained that the daughters of the homes, and often the mothers as well, were employed as packers. The children were at school. He went on to say that the

company encouraged families with grown-up daughters:

the whole family could be employed.

I had heard something of this before. Thinking from the young fellow's tone that there would be no risk in speaking frankly, I remarked.

"They are good enough to say the company gets labour

cheaper in that way."

"So it does. When half a dozen in a house are at work and get home at night, they can afford to take a lower wage apiece than if only one or two were employed, or if even the same number were employed but were at a distance from their home and had to pay lodgings."

"Still," I observed, replying to something in his tone more

than his words, "it gives work to people."
"No doubt. Though whether that's the motive is another question. If employers could get their work done by inanimate machines, they would use nothing else."

"Then you don't admire Captains of Industry, as Carlyle

calls them.'

"Carlyle!" said the young fellow contemptuously; "nobody minds Carlyle nowadays. The world is a thousand years ahead of Carlyle."

"Oh! some people believe in Carlyle yet."

"Fossils they must be. What positive teaching did Carlyle ever give? What did he advise in order to make the social state better? Nothing. He raved away about working, about doing with our might whatever our hand found to do. What rot! Why, we're doing too much; it would be better if people weren't so diligent. It's not the production that's at fault, it's the distribution. And what did Carlyle offer as a remedy for that? Nothing. He hadn't a word to say."

"Oh yes. He said this; he always insisted that society could never be held together by pounds, shillings and pence; it must be by sentiment, by mutual good-feeling," I answered,

repeating what I had often heard from Mr. Fleming.

"Yes," the young man sniffed; "people were to have kindly feelings to each other and at the same time their position was to remain unaltered. An employer and his workpeople are to entertain fine sentiments towards each other while the employer continues to draw twenty thousand a year from his establishment and his workers fifty or sixty pounds apiece. A landowner and his agricultural labourers are to have mutual good-feeling and the landowner is to go on drawing tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands from the land that the labourers cultivate for eighteen shillings a week. It's a doctrine that may suit the landlord and the capitalist, but

it'll hardly go down with the workers."

By this we were at the verge of the country. Nothing was said for a while. I saw that the young clerk, with his fluent speech and his clean-cut phrases, was more than my match at argument. It was my first experience of the kind and I did not like it. So I found it a relief to attend to the business that had brought me to Claygate. I got out my tape, and with the clerk's assistance I measured the projected road at different points. When I had made my notes we turned towards the village.

My thoughts had been excited with the discussion and I

now resumed it.

"It's easy to find fault with people who have suggested improvements on our present system, but it's not so easy to propose a remedy that won't be open to as great or greater objections."

"It's easy enough."

" How?"

"Let the people own the land and every kind of property themselves. That's the only remedy."

"That's Socialism," I said.

"Well, Socialism is the one remedy."

I shook my head. "I don't know that it would work."

"What's to hinder it?"

Never having studied Socialism I did not care to venture a reply, especially as I had a sharp critic to deal with. So I

said nothing. My companion went on:

"Take the village. People would continue to make everything that's made here—bricks and sewage-pipes—although the land and the works belonged to them instead of to Admiral Seton and Mr. Lyon and a handful of shareholders. The difference would be that they would get the profit of their labour and would be able to live much more comfortably than at present, and to work more comfortably too. They wouldn't live in those barracks, you may be sure; they would have nice roomy cottages, with gardens and recreation grounds. They would work shorter hours, too, and have more holidays, and would have all possible contrivances to make their work light and pleasant."

Once more I felt my weakness in debate and I was glad to

escape with a harmless remark:

"Certainly they might have more cheerful houses, anyway. That'll be Mr. Lyon's house?" I added, nodding towards a large brick villa standing by itself near the fields.

"No, no; that's the manager's. Mr. Lyon has a fine mansion in the direction we were just now. He owns a small estate there and has made it a little paradise. You'll see it

if you spend the night with him."

Mr. Lyon was still at the office. He had waited past his usual time to get my company, and his motor was standing ready. I excused myself. I had recollected some business that would have to be seen to first thing next morning. The truth was, I was depressed by the neighbourhood and wanted away.

The first time I was over at Nina's I told her father how I had heard Carlyle criticised, though I did not say who was

the critic.

"Your friend was hardly fair to Carlyle," said the banker. "Carlyle saw clearly enough that our system of distribution was very defective. You remember where he points out that the Manchester operatives turn out so many million cotton shirts in the shortest of time, yet have hardly a shirt to their backs themselves."

"So he does. But how does he propose to remedy this?

Has he any better system of distribution to suggest?"

"I don't know that he has," the banker replied in his slow way. "Indeed, he would hardly consider that his business. Carlyle was an inspiring force; he directed men's attention to wrongs and tried to give them his own burning desire to put them right. But he did not suggest remedies; I don't know that he had remedies to suggest. His idea would be that once people were roused they would find remedies for themselves."

The defence, while it perhaps represented the truth about

Carlyle, exposed a fatal weakness.

"I have been looking through his writings these last few days," I said, "with the object of seeing if he has any definite and positive teaching, and I can find very little. The only thing, indeed, I could give that name to is a passage in *Past and Present* on the duty of rewarding every man according to his deserts. You know the passage well."

"Fair day's-wages for fair day's-work. Thrones to this

man, prisons to that."

"That's it;" and taking down the book I read: "'The progress of Human Society consists even in this same, The better and better apportioning of wages to work. Give me this, you have given me all. Pay to every man accurately what he has worked for, what he has earned and done and deserved,—to this man broad lands and honours, to that man high gibbets and treadmills: what more have I to ask?' Now," I said, "that's very fine, but when you look into it it seems to melt away. How are you to judge of desert? Carlyle himself saw the difficulty: 'Fair day's-wages for fair day'swork! exclaims a sarcastic man: alas, in what corner of this planet, since Adam first awoke on it, was that ever realised? . . . The regular way is to hang, kill, crucify your gods, and execrate and trample them under your stupid hoofs for a century or two; till you discover that they are gods,-and then take to braying over them, still in a very long-eared manner! So speaks the sarcastic man; in his wild way, very mournful truths.' But I doubt if he saw it fully. For one thing, the difference between people, between the good and the bad, is very largely the result of circumstances. admits this himself somewhere."

"'Nevertheless, I too acknowledge the all-but omnipotence of early nurture and culture," quoted the banker. "Of course," he added, "he's speaking rather of differences of intellect, the difference betwen the genius and the dunce. Still, I suppose he would have admitted that circumstances had as

much to do with making men good or bad."

"Well, then. If a man who has had a good chance does well and another who has had a bad chance does ill, it seems hardly fair to reward the one with honours and punish the other with gibbets. Had the conditions been reversed, the ill-doer might have turned out a respectable man and the other a scoundrel."

"That's true enough," Mr. Fleming acknowledged.

"And here's a still greater difficulty in Carlyle's principle," I went on, for I could talk fluently to the banker, who was a slow speaker and a good listener; besides, I had been reflecting on the question in the last few days: "Who is to award the honours and gibbets?"

"The rulers, no doubt," said Mr. Fleming. "Carlyle

contemplated that the wisest and best should rule."

"Precisely. And that the community should choose the wisest and best for their rulers. But to recognise the wisest and best the people must be wise and good themselves, and people who are wise and good don't need rewards and punishments."

"There's a good deal in that," the banker admitted again, "and it's an old objection, I believe. After all," he continued deliberatively, "Carlyle wanted people to put things right. He didn't show them how; that wasn't his business. He would have said, Where there's a will, there's a way. His

business was to give the will."

Interesting as such talks were to me there was a stronger charm that drew me to the banker's house. Nina and I were only happy in each other's company, and we were planning how we might always be together. I was, at least, and she would let slip an odd remark that showed her thoughts were working on the same problem. Family life was growing attractive to me, for my work was not so satisfying as it had been. I lived in an atmosphere of ill-will; the farmers, the villagers, disliked me, and I could no longer fence myself with jaunty defiance. The change had begun in me, I think, with that visit to Claygate; certainly it dated from that. To comfort and fortify myself I would reflect that other men had unpleasant things to bear, no matter what their calling was. A greater comfort was to look forward to a " bower of bliss" where no troubles would intrude. When I married Nina I would keep my home-life and my factor-work well apart. As soon as I came into my smart little home of an evening, I would leave behind me all the day's worries, and in talking with my stately bride, in listening to her melting songs, I would know perfect joy.

My prospects warranted those dreams. The admiral would help me, I knew, to a settlement. He was satisfied with my general services and my conduct of the right-of-way dispute had given him positive delight. He was staying more at Lowis again, and I have heard him declare that he took a new pleasure in his home now that his favourite cover was safe from stragglers. And the episode seemed to have made him more popular. The village youths were overjoyed with the gift of the football field, and any odium that had been occasioned by the dispute attached to others than the admiral.

His one aim achieved, the admiral began to press to the

other, and here I could not support him with the same heart. That little property of Ralston's! If only it were absorbed in Lowis, the admiral would have peace. Unluckily for me, the factor was fully with him here. While quite friendly with its owner, Meiklejohn felt that till Cambuslochan changed hands the Lowis authorities had a genuine grievance.

Our lawyers in Craigkenneth had made formal offers for the place and had been snubbed. Meiklejohn now urged me

to act.

"He'll be more ready to listen to you, James," he would say. Or again, "Now's the time to try him, James. Money will be welcome to him at this moment."

While careful to hide my real feelings, I would object.

"The offer should come from you. He would see that you meant business."

Then the factor would represent to me that Ralston trusted me and knew I would propose nothing but what was for his good; that we were ready to give more than the place was worth and far more than it would fetch in the open market, and that the sale would really be for Ralston's benefit.

"Suggest the thing in an off-hand way when you're down

some evening," he kept saying.

At last he grew so urgent, assuring me it was now or never, that I had to yield. Still, I could not make the proposal under my friend's roof. Ralston and his young wife had been so kind, wee Bab and Harriet had grown so fond of me and I of them, that I could not play the Judas outright. But in Craigkenneth Mart one day, while talking with Mr. Ralston on other things, I remarked.

"Sawers's people haven't been writing you about Cambus-

lochan lately?"

"You mean, offering for it?"

I nodded.

"No," said my friend, "not lately."

"The admiral would give you a big price for it, Mr. Ralston."

"I daresay," he said with a smile.

"He'd go as high as four thousand pounds."

"It's not in the market, James;" and his look was almost a frown.

"That's final?"

"Final."

And with this answer I returned to the factor.

I knew better than any outsider that money would be welcome to my friend. He had told me a while before that trouble was brewing over his load-adjuster. It had been fully patented, and Mr. Ralston had spent a good deal of money, raised, I afterwards learned, on mortgage, in bringing it before the public. Now, a London company was booming an appliance manifestly copied from his, and if his invention was to make him any return he would have to sue the rogues for infringement of patent. The dispute had not yet got into the papers and I had never breathed it to Meiklejohn, indeed to anybody. So I could not tell how the factor came to know of it or even if it was this he had hinted at.

Between my friendship for the Ralstons and my duty to the admiral I was likely to be in a predicament. My safe course was to keep away from Cambuslochan, dear as the place had grown. I did not visit it for some weeks, and it was from a conversation between the admiral and his factor that I learned the next move in the game. Mr. Ralston was trying to raise a second mortgage on his farm. The factor knew in this way. Ralston's solicitors had assured their client they would do their utmost to find the money; instead, they communicated his difficulties to Meiklejohn. They knew, of course, that the Lowis authorities had long coveted their neighbour's place, and their motive in betraying their client was, I infer, to gain the admiral's support for the County Clerkship which was soon to be vacant.

"Now would be the time to fight him about the ditch," Meiklejohn suggested.

"If he has the pluck to fight," the admiral questioned.
"Oh, he's stubborn enough."

The factor did not discuss the affair with me. I had let him know that I was not visiting the Ralstons, and he may have concluded that my interference had occasioned a coldness between us. To be in the dark while danger threatened my friends was unbearable. I called one evening and gave extra work as excuse for my long absence. Had I been a brother returning after years of exile, my welcome could not have been heartier. The Ralstons knew about Nina and they had been afraid, they said, that the attractions of Aletown were making me neglect old friends.

When his wife was putting the children to bed, I asked Mr. Ralston abruptly, for I could not afford to lose the chance,

"Are you having any bother over the Knowefield ditch?" He looked at me steadily some seconds.

"Yes, James; I am having bother, very serious bother, too."
"I have no information," I assured him, "none whatever.
Only I had a suspicion there might be trouble over it ere long."

"I'll show you;" and he left the room for a letter. "The ditch, as you know, James," he said on returning, "is choked up and can't carry away heavy rain. The result is that the water overflows into the Well park and is cutting a regular channel down the side. I advised Meiklejohn of this three times. When he took no action, I wrote him that I would clear the ditch out myself. Here's a letter from Sawers."

The admiral's agents threatened Mr. Ralston with proceed-

ings should he interfere with the ditch.

"You observe," my friend pointed out, "they say nothing about the admiral having it cleaned."

"What do you think of doing?" I asked.

" Just what I told them: give them so many days to have the ditch put right and, if they take no action, put it right myself."

"And involve yourself in a lawsuit?"

" Possibly."

"About a dirty ditch?"

"It's not a trifle. The overflow damages my park and it'll get worse instead of better."

"Will it be as costly as a lawsuit?"

"But I've right on my side. Anybody knows I'm only asking what's reasonable."

"That's not the question, Mr. Ralston, when one goes to law. It's not, who has right on his side? but, who has the

longest purse?"

Mr. Ralston bit his lip. "I'm aware of that, James, and I've known my purse better filled than it is at this moment. All the same, I'll make a struggle for my rights. It's not the ditch affair alone; the question is really coming to be, Are other people not to be allowed to live near the Lowis gentry? They're making one encroachment after another, and soon it'll be that nobody will be able to live in the countryside but themselves."

"Never mind other people, Mr. Ralston; it's yourself you have to look to. No use going into a fight when you're not ready."

"Then I'm to stand by and see my park ruined?"

"I never said so."
"What, then?"

"I'm surprised that a noted inventor needs to get a tip from a novice. Why not bank up your hedge at the place where the ditch overflows? That would drive the water across the road into the field opposite, which," I added with a laugh, "doesn't belong to you."

Mr. Ralston scratched his head and reflected. His wife, who had returned to the parlour some time before, sat watching

his face.

"The fact is," he said at last, "I never thought of that."

" Well?"

"It's worth trying;" and he gave a laugh.

After some talk he consented to try my plan, and he then spoke of the trouble arising over his patent. He had arranged to bring an action against the company that was trading on his invention, and, as the company appeared to have capital, the suit might be tedious and costly.

A few days later the case was mentioned in the papers, and I heard Meiklejohn and the admiral lament that their neigh-

bour had given way in the local dispute.

"He's not prepared to die in the last ditch," said the admiral with rather a grim smile.

## CHAPTER XXIV

O one person only could I speak freely on this trouble.

Nina, though she had not met the Ralstons, liked them because they had been kind to me, and every time I visited Aletown she asked about their affairs.

The next news I gave her was that Mr. Ralston was finding it difficult to raise his second mortgage. I told her how I came to know.

"McKerracher's people are giving him away. They played with him a while, pretending to be looking about for the money, and they advised him to have his farm valued, so that any client who thought of advancing the money might know he had good security. Mr. Ralston agreed. Then the McKerrachers suggest a valuator, the factor at Shirgarvie. They give him a hint and he undervalues the place shamefully, puts it down at  $f_2,500$  as an arable farm and  $f_3,000$  as a dairy place. It's worth half as much again at the very least. But you see the trick, dear? There's a bond of  $f_1,200$  on the farm already, and nobody will advance a second mortgage of  $f_1,500$  on a property that's only worth  $f_2,500$ , for it's an understood thing that a place should never be bonded to more than two-thirds of its value."

Nina warmly declared it was a shame.

"Yes, and it troubles me very much," I told her. "I know of the plotting that goes on and yet I'm helpless."

"Still, you have nothing to do with it, Jim. You're not

plotting against him."

"Certainly not. But I feel very much to have to listen

to it all and be able to say and do nothing."

"You did something about the ditch," Nina reminded me, and we both laughed over the trick. But I soon grew sober again. "What would you do, Nina, if a friend of yours was being led into a trap?"

She looked perplexed. "I suppose," she said at last, "I should just do as you are doing, Jim—say nothing, but at the same time take no part in it. If the admiral and—and other people do such things, that's their business. I suppose it's your duty to keep quiet, though I know it must be very hard."

"It is. I often wish my ears were stuffed so that I couldn't

hear their plots."

However, I soon had surprising news. I was again keeping away from Cambuslochan. One day at the mart Mr. Ralston got hold of me and rallied me on the likely cause. It was near one o'clock and my friend hauled me into the luncheonroom. After we had a snack together, he ordered a second whisky for himself and another glass of beer for me; then he tossed down half a sovereign to pay for all and would not listen to a word of protest.

"No, no, my boy," and he came over to my side, "this is my lucky day. I've been in at McKerracher's," he continued in a whisper; "he wrote, asking me to call. That little business is settled. The loan's ready, and I've the wherewithal to push the adjuster and smash those London rascals."

I drank luck to him with all heartiness, but thinking over the news later I felt uneasy and I shared my concern with

my usual confidante.

There was another friend that Nina did not like so well to hear me speak about. Miss Maymie was now making Wiston Court her home, greatly to the surprise of the Lowis folk, who had thought she would feel the place strange and lonely, and would prefer to be nearer her parents. After seeing the Court occasionally I understood her motives. My first visit was an unexpected one; Meiklejohn was laid up with rheumatism and he sent me in his place. It did seem odd to me at first that the young marchioness should care for this property. She had been brought up in one of the loveliest districts of the land, where every day of her life she looked on fertile plains, sweet pastoral hills, and noble mountains; the country round Wiston was as flat as a floor and there was not an eminence in sight. It was not even well wooded, and its pasture and green-crops-for grain was almost entirely abandoned-made it look bare and poor to eyes familiar with Craigkenneth carse. What gave it charm to Miss Maymie? This, I felt sure: her social consequence. Here she had never been a

plain miss, a commoner's daughter; she was known only for a great lady. Her only superior in rank, a duke, was an elderly bachelor and an absentee; Miss Maymie was left the leader of the county aristocracy. As my visits grew more frequent, I became aware too that her dependants here were different from the common people she had been used to. The farmers were slow and heavy, the labourers dull, loutish, servile. The tenantry and ploughmen at Lowis never forgot that the laird and his family were not a whit different from themselves under the clothes, at least under the skin; the natives here felt that the marchioness and they belonged to different races and they acquiesced in the distinction. Now, the homage they rendered her was grateful to the young lady. Whether she had it in her always and only needed the chance to show it, whether it had been gendered by fortune, she certainly displayed as much complacent pride as any queen. With it all she kept her hard common-sense. The head of each department on her property had to be a capable person. and was usually drawn from the north, the rest were natives and slaves.

These natives, so different from our northern ploughmen, began to interest me much as strange animals might have done. Slow of speech and movement, they seemed at first to know nothing, be fit for nothing; give them time, and you found they knew and could do all things in their province, though to explain their operations in words was beyond them. Horses, cattle, sheep, they understood, understood better than I did; their sluggish patience, maybe, was the secret of the sympathy. At their work they used antiquated implements and their methods were often cumbrous; but the fault was their masters', who had no enterprise. They were undoubtedly slower than the ploughmen I had known; yet with this, again, their masters had to do. A Hamptonshire farmer might have learned much from the Lowis tenantry on the art of driving his workers on. After allowing for all their defects I was humbled to find that these lumbering inarticulate figures had so much practical knowledge in their heads and could pass so much useful work through their clumsy-looking hands. Knowledge of the showier sort they did not own. They read with difficulty and could hardly write. I was told the labourers hereabout had been enthusiastic supporters of Arch and had all been in the Agricultural Union. That was a generation

ago and more. Now the Union was dead, and the labourer

had no interest wider than his day's work.

How did they contrive to exist? I asked myself. Their wage had fallen almost as low as in pre-Union days. Four-teen shillings a week was the average, and out of this a cottage rent had to come. About Craigkenneth a fully-qualified ploughman could command at least a pound and free housing. That the rural labourers in Hamptonshire felt they had no future was shown by this: the sons were not brought up to their father's calling. All the young men migrated to the Black Country to earn big money in mines and iron-works. The labourers did not appear to blame the squire or the farmer for their poverty; they understood, I suppose, that the value of land was down and they would charge the fault on circumstances.

It happens sometimes—a reason could be given if one had time—that mute and helpless sufferers draw our sympathy more than others that murmur and resist. I found myself thinking a great deal about those dumb stolid toilers and wondering if their poverty was inevitable. For it was their poverty that exercised me first. Could they not get a decenter wage, live in a little more comfort? Then their helplessness appealed to me. A farmer or a squire was the god that ruled their lot; he kept them in poverty, with a word he could bring them to destitution. I saw this, but with pity only;

I did not for an instant question its justice.

I had chances enough for studying the Hamptonshire labourer. The marchioness may have been like the French lady who never trusted a man till he had been in love with her. Certainly she trusted me, and once I got the way to Wiston she would have had me on the road every week. Lowis people joked me about my luck; some even took it seriously, I knew-believed that the marchioness had more than a business preference for me, and that I, presuming doubtless on my looks, had ambition and impudence enough to hope for her hand. Meiklejohn knew better, though he often had a quiet joke when I was summoned south. He was tired of the journeys himself, and as I consulted him on all that was doing at the Court he had no room for jealousy. But there was one who did not take the intimacy so lightly. Nina must certainly have been aware that the marchioness and I had no serious designs on one another; only, she did

not know the marchioness so well, did not know how she prized her title and dignity, and she may have feared that even a great lady would not let social distinctions bar a flirtation. Nina thought, too, as I was yet to learn, that on my side there was more than the hireling's zeal and that I would do for Lady Soar what I would not for my own employer. And then she knew, for I had told her myself, how I had adored Miss Maymie in my boyhood. Did she fear the old ashes might kindle? Anyway, she was indifferent to the changes at the Court and impatient of my journeys. One day in October I had arranged to meet her and Mrs. Fleming in Craigkenneth. Nina spoke of a concert that was to be given at Aletown in a week's time. She was to sing and I had already promised to come down. But a day or two before there had come a summons to Wiston. I was to superintend an experiment that was to be made at the Home Farm in the different ways of clamping turnips. Perhaps I had a little pleasure in showing Nina that even for such trifles my presence was thought necessary.

"You don't need to attend to such a thing," she said with some reason; "why can't the bailiff do that? What's the

use of having one if you're to do his work?"

I answered in the bantering way I had at that time, a way that must have been trying to my friends, that a bailiff couldn't be expected to do business as well as myself.

Nina did not smile. She looked annoyed, though she

controlled herself.

"You're not Lady Soar's servant," she said. "You are

only engaged to work for Admiral Seton."

"True, my dear. Only, you see, it might hurt me even with the admiral if I didn't make myself useful to his daughter."

"It doesn't matter. If you do the work you were engaged

for, that's all they've a right to expect."

The words surprised me. Nina was anxious, I knew, that I should advance in my profession; her own interest was concerned. Yet she was counselling conduct that was not likely to bring promotion. I did not understand that a woman, at least a girl, will rather see her lover and herself lose an advantage than owe it to a rival. So I merely remarked in my bantering way that a lady like the marchioness must be obeyed; everything must give way to her.

Thereupon Nina exploded. With a viciousness in her eyes and voice that startled me, she said,

"It's perfectly true what they say of you; you're nothing

but a toady."

How the cruel words shocked me I cannot hope to tell. It was as if a hammer had smote me on the heart. I did not speak, I did not try to cover my emotion: concealment was useless. Nina too was silent, though from sullenness apparently, and ere another word passed her mother joined us. Before we parted, I told Mrs. Fleming why I could not attend the concert. It could not be helped, she said; they would be seeing me at any rate the Wednesday before, at Nina's birthday party. Nina gave no sign of pleasure at my response; the sulky look was on her face when we said good-bye.

Some young companions of the Flemings were at the birthday party, among them a lad in a writer's office whom I had met at the banker's before and had rather taken to. From the time the company gathered, Nina, who had treated me as a mere acquaintance, attacked him and tried to draw him into a flirtation. After the dancing began he could not get away from her side. At first he only submitted to her attentions; his own sweetheart was present; besides, he had been friendly with me and would not like to give me pain. Later, as Nina persisted in her attack, he yielded completely, and the pair had a night of demonstrative love-making. Miss Reid was chaffed about her loss, and while affecting to take it goodhumouredly she could not altogether hide her uneasiness. So at least did I interpret her feelings, reading her heart, perhaps, by my own. She and I were together a good deal and kept up an appearance of cheerfulness, which both knew to be false. I had only one dance with Nina, and in the course of it she did not speak a word. When I went to bed, deep into the morning, I had such a sinking of the heart as I had not known for years. Sleep was impossible, and I tried to gather my bewildered thoughts. The pitiless insult Nina had flung at me some days before had been tearing my heart ever since; here was something more, something worse. The insult had made me know that my sweetheart could despise me; her behaviour to-night showed that she could think of another. Never had this possibility been in my thoughts; it had always been accepted that she was mine. As I thought of her preferring a rival, it seemed that the

heart had been torn out of my breast. A girl whose favourite doll has been stolen, a mother whose one child has been kidnapped—I felt like them. I was forsaken; my sweetheart was happy with another. The incidents of the night forced themselves on my memory. Nina's face, her eyes bright with love-making, rose in the dark as vivid as it had been at the dance. Cruel doubts thronged upon me. When had Nina begun to fancy young Balfour? Had there been love-making between them before? How would they use the chances that nearness and friendship gave them? Jealousy furnished answers, each charged with poison. Fancy after fancy, all sorts of conjectures, all sorts of visions and pictures, streamed through my brain, and ever the glowing face of my false sweetheart would rise from among them as vividly as life. My thoughts grew more wild, more torturing, till I felt I was near madness. I did not sleep an instant, and when I came down to breakfast there was another disappointment: Nina had kept her bed; she had a headache. So I left Aletown with her flirtation as the last memory.

After spending the day at the office I started for the Midlands with the evening mail. Though utterly jaded I could not sleep. Gnawing doubts were busy. How had Nina been spending the day, the evening? Had she and Balfour met? Had there been more flirtation? I wandered about the corridors like a prisoner, and I welcomed the arrival at Wiston

because I had room to flee from myself.

The experiments there interested me and needed attention. so love-cares were less obtrusive; yet all the while I knew that, as with my dreams of Miss Maymie long ago, my duties were but bubbles on the stream. In the evening I was at passion's mercy once more, and I had no reasonable succour. The marchioness was not at home, there was no one about the Court I cared to talk with. To forget myself I drank a good deal at dinner, and the drink and fatigue sent me to sleep as soon as I lay down. In the early morning I woke and could not sleep again: maddening doubts and fancies were on me. The forenoon I spent with the bailiff and was then free to leave. I had listened to his talk on estate affairs, had discussed stock and buildings, with outward calm, and he would never guess that my thoughts were half a kingdom's length away, that I was hearing myself called a loathsome name, that I was watching a pair of hazel eyes sparkle—but not for me.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE midland train I returned by reached Carlisle about seven. Always before, when I travelled by this train, I got a connection for Craigkenneth within an hour. Now I found that, among the petty economies which the north companies were effecting, this train had been discontinued since the beginning of the month. The midnight express would land me on Craigkenneth platform at an unearthly hour. My other course was to stay the night in Carlisle. There was plenty of time to decide, and meantime I had something to eat in the County Hotel and saw that a bed would be ready if required. Want of sleep was telling on me, and I should gladly have lain down had I not shrunk from the terrors that had been haunting my lonely nights. Still undecided whether to leave by the express or wait till morning, I lit a cigar and strolled down as far as the river. It would be after ten when I was nearing the hotel again. A good many people were in the street, and at the Viaduct three men walking abreast reached the corner at the moment I did. The face of one was familiar.

"Name?" I asked with a laugh, as I held out my hand.

"Mine is Bryce."

He laughed also. "Mine is Rankin. From Claygate."

It was the clerk at Lyon's works. In my desolate mood I should have been glad to meet an acquaintance of any sort. I was doubly pleased at encountering one who had proved so interesting before. I told him how I came to be in Carlisle, and he in turn explained that he was travelling for the firm, as he had occasionally to do, and was to leave for Newcastle next day. His companions meanwhile had crossed over and halted in a short side-street.

"Come along and meet my friends," Rankin urged, after informing me that he had been at a lecture in the Viaduct

Hall and that one of his companions had been the lecturer. When we overtook them near the post office they were standing with another man whom they in turn were constraining to join their company. We were introduced and walked on together, turning along Warwick Road to the house of one of the party, a Mr. Bulman. As I afterwards learned, he owned a small foundry in Carlisle, was an ardent Socialist and entertained the Labour lecturers who came to the town. The lecturer of the night, Dave Trenery, official of some sort in one of the great artisan associations of the country, was a little barrel of a man, with small chubby features and a long spreading red beard. When Rankin introduced me as one interested in social questions, Trenery had said in a loud deliberate voice,

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bryce. If you're really interested in those questions, you'll be a good Socialist ere long,

if you're not one already."

"Mr. Trenery thinks all honest inquirers land there as surely as all rivers run into the sea," said Mr. Bulman as if

trying to make things pleasant.

We could not open a discussion in the street. When we reached Bulman's house we were taken into a parlour where Mrs. Bulman brought out a decanter of whisky. Soon we were engaged with our grog and tobacco, all but the man Atkinson that had joined us at the post office. He neither smoked nor drank. He was a short, broad man of, maybe, sixty, a workman certainly, I guessed a shoemaker, for his skin had the brownish-yellow hue often noticeable in the complexion of leather-workers. His trade, in fact, was clog-making.

The talk was first of the lecture and the audience. Atkinson and I were silent, and, perhaps to draw me into the conversation, young Rankin explained that I was naturally attracted to social questions because, being a land-agent, I had dealings with all classes connected with the land. He understood, however, that I was not satisfied as to Socialism being a solution of those questions. I was not sure that it

would work.

"No wonder," old Atkinson interposed in a voice that was

almost a growl.

"What! have we another doubter in the company, another Thomas?" demanded Trenery. "And what may be your objections to Socialism, friend?"

"I object to its motives, its methods, and its men," answered Atkinson with a readiness that showed he had thought on the subject and could speak his thoughts. "But you are to satisfy Mr. Bryce first, I understand. I may get a chance

later if Mr. Bryce doesn't keep your hands full.

"Well," I began, a little embarrassed at having to speak before such a company on a subject I was not master of, "I should explain that I haven't studied Socialism and have hardly a right to criticise it. How would you define Socialism?" I asked the lecturer, glad of a chance to make him speak instead of me.

"I'll put it in a word," he said oracularly; "it means, everything for each and all. Land, capital, the instruments of production, the things produced, will be for the use and the enjoyment of all alike. Class distinctions will disappear and

be replaced by equality and brotherhood."
"Yes. Only what I'm not sure about is this. things be managed better under such a system than under the

present one?"

"A thousand times better. Have you ever read that book?" and he named an American work that had apparently had a great vogue years before.

I had never seen it.

"Well," he continued, "it gives the picture of a city with all conceivable conveniences and luxuries, far finer than anything the privileged enjoy with us. And everybody gets a share of them, that's the beauty of the thing. And how is it done? By straining the workers? Not at all. It's done by having no drones, by making everybody work, and work in a well-organised system."

"I never read the book," I admitted again; "but the state it pictures seems to me quite impossible."

"How, pray?"
"Because," I said, hesitating a good deal in my reply "if everybody is to have luxuries, such as a duke has at present, that's to say, if we're all to live in splendid mansions and ride in motors and wear diamonds, it'll take an enormous lot of labour to provide those things. Of course, you say more people are employed and their work is better organised. That's all right. But, as a set-off, the luxuries are to be far finer and everybody is to have them, ten or perhaps a hundred, for one that has them now. It seems to me a certainty that

people will still be oppressed with labour; the only difference will be that all will be oppressed, instead of some, as at

present."

"Oh, not at all; utter nonsense, my dear sir," said Mr. Trenery. "With our labour-saving machinery and our perfect organisation we'll turn out all we can desire with perhaps an hour's work per day."

As I had no answer ready, I merely shook my head. The lecturer was about to continue when the old clogger interposed.

"Did it never occur to you that there might be an easier way to deal with the luxuries?"

"And what may that be, Mr. Atkinson?"

"Abolish them altogether." As Trenery in turn was slow with an answer, the other went on, "What Mr. Bryce says is perfectly true, as any child who knows that two and two make four could tell. If you want fineries, you'll have to work for them, and the more fineries the more work. But there's this besides: it never has an end. The more you get, the more you'll want. What's the sensible thing, then? Do without them. If I don't wear a new velvet suit every week but make a suit of moleskin last me the year through, I spare the tailors. If my wife wears no diamonds, the labour of the digger, and sailor, and cutter, and merchant, and company-promoter, and I don't know how many more, is saved. So with everything. If you don't need much, you don't have to slave to get it; and, better still, other folk don't have to slave for you."

Trenery was ready to speak, but the Claygate clerk was

before him.

"That's a bare miserable life; it's not worth living. For my part, I want all that's going, all that we have at present, and all that's yet to be invented. Only I want others to get

them the same as myself."

"Yes," growled old Atkinson, "and that's just my objection to what I call the motive of Socialism. Socialists—I mean the ruck of them—are moved by the desire to get as much comfort and luxury as possible. That's the road that leads straight away from salvation. A man should try to do with as few material comforts as possible. He should feel that the less he depends on outward possessions, the more a man is he."

"No, no, no," roared the lecturer, who could no longer be

repressed; "Mr. Rankin is perfectly right. We're entitled to a full development of all our faculties, and that's just another way of saying that we're entitled to the enjoyment of all imaginable inventions and discoveries. And we'll have them. And what's more, we'll have them, as our young friend says, in a perfection never dreamed of—poems grander than Shake-speare's, pictures finer than Holman Hunt's;" and with his short pudgy arm he made a sweep as if haranguing thousands.

The old clogger kept his eyes on the floor and seemed too much disgusted to attempt any rejoinder. But as no one

else spoke, he made an effort over himself.

"Suppose we take pictures. What's a picture, after all? Merely a shadow of the real. Why do people like paintings, or profess to like them? Because they've lost the use of their eyes; they can't see Nature. Can any paintings of the sea match the sea itself? What man in his senses would shut himself up in a room to look at paintings of the sky if he could live in country air and look up at the sky when he liked? All this luxury you've been talking about isn't a means of helping us to enjoy life; it's an encumbrance, it's an obstruction, it keeps us from the sun, it keeps us in a stuffy room when we might be out of doors. And all this talk about Art has done as much as anything to hinder real reform. I told Ruskin that when he was blathering in Fors. And he came to see it, for he said more than once that he felt he would never do any good till he stopped talking and began to work like a man. But, poor soul! he hadn't the courage any more than the rest of us."

"I'll go with you on the fresh-air line," said Mr. Bulman, who had mostly contented himself with listening. "After being in a foundry for five-and-thirty years as man and master, I've reached the conclusion that fresh air is just about the finest thing in the world. And I guess," he added with a laugh, as he looked at my fresh cheeks, "here's a young gentleman

that's very much of my mind."

"Yes," I admitted, "I spend a good part of my life in the open air. There's a picture-gallery at—at the place I live on, and, if the people about went into it no oftener than I, it

might be shut up."

I was conscious, however, even while making the remark, that it was not merely indifference to Art that kept me out of the Lowis gallery.

Mr. Trenery addressed the young clerk in a jocular tone.

"It's quite evident, Mr. Rankin, that you and I are the only persons of refined taste in the company. We must leave these barbarians to their native ignorance. They'll soon be running about the woods naked if they get their way."

No one cared to retort. Indeed, the talk seemed like languishing when Mr. Bulman, to give it fresh life, addressed

the clogger:

"If I remember, though, you had three counts in your indictment of Socialism—"

"The three M's," laughed my Claygate friend.

"Yes. And you've only given us one—the motive of Socialism. I'm sure Mr. Trenery will be glad to hear you on the other two heads, the—what was it again?"

"The methods and the men," prompted the clerk."

"Yes. The methods and the men."

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the lecturer; "and I only hope my friend will be able to make out a stronger case than he has done on the first point. What are your objections to the methods of Socialism, friend?"

The old man hitched his shoulders to draw himself together

and began in his gruff tones and Cumbrian accent.

"You talked about the great output of conveniences and luxuries there would be under Socialism and about their fair distribution. Who are to direct the manufacture of these and their distribution?"

"We'll have organisers, of course; men, the most qualified men, who will organise labour to the best advantage both in production and distribution."

"In a word, you'll have rulers."

"I prefer the term 'organisers,' because they'll be chosen by

the community and be responsible to the community."

"We needn't quarrel about the name. Organisers, be it. Anyhow, according to you, those organisers are to direct the workers in producing and distributing things."

"That is so."

"Suppose a worker refused to obey the direction of those

organisers, would-?"

"Oh, Mr. Atkinson, I can't suppose such a thing. The community at large would be so harmonious that no individual would think of disobeying his chosen administrators."

"Suppose a worker did refuse," persisted Atkinson, "would

the administrators, as you call them now, have power to make him obey?"

"Undoubtedly. The community would arm them with such power. We don't want anarchy in our new state."

"We've got this length, then. There are to be workers and there are to be directors or organisers or administrators armed with power to make the workers obey them. Now, you told us to start with, that there would be no class-distinctions under Socialism; yet here are two great classes, administrators and workers. You told us there would be equality under Socialism, yet here's a set of folks with power to make the rest obey them."

I laughed at what seemed to me a triumphant argument, and our host joined in the laugh. Indeed, while he must have been a believer in Socialism, he had evidently a great liking for old Atkinson and a good deal of sympathy with his opinions.

Mr. Trenery was not ready with a rejoinder. He was beginning with an "Oh, now," when the Claygate clerk interposed,

"I never understood that there was to be strict equality

under Socialism-"

"We were told so to start with," the old man interrupted. "But as you two Socialists appear to differ on that point, a pretty serious one too, I'll leave you to fight it out between yourselves. It wants just ten minutes of midnight and I've a wife waiting for me, a thing you youngsters know nothing about yet, I take it. So I'll only have a minute to state my objections to the third of the three M's, as our young friend put it, the men in this movement."

"Now we're in for it," laughed Mr. Bulman, while the

lecturer said in his oracular way,

"We shan't be much hurt unless it's very different from the previous attacks. What do you find to object to in the men of the Socialist movement?"

"My objection is to the leaders of the movement."

"Very good. And what do you object to in the leaders

of the movement?"

"I'll name some Socialist leaders," said the clogger, "half a dozen of them," and he gave some familiar names. "Now, who are those fellows? Three of them are writers, three of them are or have been trade-union agents, and the smaller men among the leaders belong, with very few exceptions, to one or other of those two classes; they make their living by the pen or they make it as officials of some Union. We'll take the last lot first. The Union agents have mostly been working-men at one time, but stopped working as soon as they got the chance—"

"Oh! have they?" broke in Mr. Trenery. "If you tried their job, you would find whether they had to work or not."

"Have stopped working," pursued the clogger steadily, and live now by spouting."

All roared except the speaker and his antagonist. Old

Atkinson, with unmoved face, continued,

"The other fellows, the writers, never worked; they have always lived by spouting, spouting on paper, spouting in plays or novels or newspaper leaders. A stroke of real work is what they never did since they were born. And it's men of those two classes, men who never knew what work is and men who got out of work as soon as they could, it's those two sets of fellows that lead the Labour movement. No wonder genuine working-men don't join the movement. Can you conceive genuine working-men led by a crew of parasites?"

"Oh, oh!" protested young Rankin laughingly. "Order,

order!"

Mr. Bulman and I roared again, and Trenery, too, gave a laugh, though in affected scorn. The old clogger was as grim as ever.

"So it comes to this," he continued, rising from his chair. "First we were ruled by landlords, now we're ruled by landlords and capitalists, and soon we're to be ruled by spouters. If we're to have rulers at all, I'd rather have the landlord or the capitalist than the spouter, any day."

"Just wait a little and I'll smash your argument to powder," Trenery began; but old Atkinson was already at the door and

saying,

"I'll need to prepare for my wife's arguments. Good-

night, everybody." He left us.

My friend and I only waited long enough to take a rather more ceremonious leave. As we were making ready to go remarks passed on the old clogger, and Mr. Bulman informed us that at one time Atkinson had done fine work in the boot and shoe trade. After his opinions on social matters had taken their present form, he gave that up and started clogging. This was a great downcome for his wife and had occasioned much

dispeace in the house. The old fellow did not stop there. He was anxious to move out into the country and cultivate a piece of ground while still pursuing his craft. As yet his wife had been able to deter him, though with a struggle that caused perpetual strife.

Young Rankin was staying at the Bush Hotel and he convoyed me round to the County. We spoke of the late discussion as we strolled along. While admitting that Trenery was not a powerful champion, my Claygate friend had lost

none of his faith in Socialism.

## CHAPTER XXVI

HE talk at Bulman's had laid my love-torments; a stiff whisky at the hotel kept them down and allowed me to steal a few hours' sleep. When I woke it was still dark and I made haste to sleep again. Unfortunately, my room looked on to the line, and the whistling and snorting of engines, the bumping of coaches, kept me wakeful till my invisible tormentors gathered and began gnawing at my heart. Soon the torture was unbearable; I rose and dressed. It was hardly seven o'clock and still the grey of morning. My breakfast was bespoken for half-past eight, and I resolved to spend the long interval out of doors. The name at the corner of the station-square— Botchergate—reminded me that Atkinson had his shop in that street, and I strolled along to have a look at it. Not far down I observed his sign above a small single shop on the left side. The place, of course, was still shut. I sauntered out London Road, and when I returned to the spot I found the door was open though the shutters were not down. As I crossed the street Atkinson came out and was proceeding to remove the bars when he noticed me, and favoured me with a nod and what on a softer face would have been a smile.

"And what do you think of our London oracle?" he asked, when we had stood a minute exchanging a word or two of

greeting.

"He didn't strike me as a genius when he got into your hands," I said, laughing. "It's rather surprising to see a

fellow like him in an important post."

"He has gab and cheek, and you know with how little wisdom the world is governed. I used to see a good deal of those Labour leaders till I drew off in utter disgust. They're a rum lot."

"You've corresponded with some big men, Mr. Atkinson,"

I said; "I think you mentioned that you had written to Ruskin."

"Yes, if you call him a big man. At one time in my life I thought there might be good to be got from those self-named prophets, and I laid my difficulties before them and would fain have read wisdom into their answers. It wouldn't do. I found that a man has to make his way alone. You seldom fall in with the right guide, and almost never till he's not needed. And it's not for want of trying a variety. I have letters from scores of them, from Carlyle down to-"

"Oh! you have letters from Carlyle!" I said, much interested. Once Mr. Fleming told me he had often wished to write to his hero, but had never had the courage. "I have

a friend who is a great admirer of Carlyle and he-

"I didn't know there were any left," the clogger inter-

rupted.

"He's the only one I know," I admitted, laughing. "So for his sake the letters would interest me. Perhaps if I'm this way again I might get a sight of them, that's to say, if there's nothing private in them."

"Nothing at all; the whole world might read them.

When do you leave, Mr. Bryce?"

"At 9.10 and I've breakfast to take yet."

"Oh ay. Because I was going to say you might have come round just now. My house is in Tait Street there. But you couldn't manage it."

"Sorry, no. But perhaps some other time."

"Give me your address, Mr. Bryce, and I'll send them on. That'll let your friend see them as well. I hope they'll give him more light than ever they gave me."

I thanked him warmly, and promised to take the greatest

care of the documents and return them without delay.

"We'd survive it though they were lost," said the old man. "They're interesting as curiosities; that's all, I'm afraid. Come into the shop, Mr. Bryce, and give me your address."

I gave it him and my name in full.
"Do I need to put 'Junior' or anything like that?" he asked.

"No. My father died long ago."

"Excuse me for asking. But I understood you helped to manage an estate, and I know it's a line where father and son often work together."

"Yes; but it was purely through accident that I got into it."

"And do you find yourself comfortable in it?" he asked, speaking quietly and slowly and eyeing me keenly the while.

"Oh, well," and I hesitated, "it's pleasant enough in some

ways. Certainly it has drawbacks like everything else."

Atkinson shook his head. "Very serious drawbacks, I should say. Still, you're young, Mr. Bryce, and, I suppose, not married?"

"No, no," I said with a laugh.

"Keep that way as long as you can. You've time to travel far yet, and there's hope for you, seeing you're alone. Once a man has a woman to study——" and the old clogger gave his head a hopeless shake to round the sentence.

I laughed again. But looking my watch I found it was time for breakfast, and after a hasty but hearty good-bye I spedaway.

As I neared home, all sorts of conjectures about my sweetheart thronged upon me. When my old landlady casually remarked, "There was somebody here asking for you," my heart gave a wild bound. It was a man, however, Mrs. Paterson went on to say, a working-man to appearance, with a face she had seen before. He did not give his name; he would see me some other time.

Day followed day and jealousy gave me ceaseless torment. Was Nina meeting my rival often? What were they doing when together? Eagerly I watched for every post, nightly I repaired to Parkend hoping for chance news. On the market-day I spent most of the time in Craigkenneth streets, for Nina knew I should be in town then, and she might run through for the sake of meeting me. Nina was not there and I wandered the streets with a heavy heart.

About lunch-time I turned into the mart and was making for the refreshment-rooms when someone touched my elbow.

It was Liddell.

"Could ye slip roon' to the loadin'-bank?" he asked in a low voice. "I've something to tell ye. If ye mak' yer way roon', I'll be efter ye."

I did as he directed and waited near the spot where I had

read Nina's first letter. What a change from then!

Liddell soon lounged up, trying to look as if he had no errand. On joining me he glanced round to make sure we were not observed.

"I was feared ye werena in the day, Mr. Bryce," he began; and he went on to say that he had watched for me last Thursday, and then had come out to Lowis. "However," he concluded, "it's a richt noo, and I'll put aff nae time in talkin. My dinner-oor 'll sune be up. Here's what I want to speak aboot. Auld Kirkwood's leavin' sune."

This was an old farmer who had never got on well with

Meiklejohn and was now retiring.

"His tack is out at Martinmas next year," I said.

"Ay. And ye'll hae to gie him compensation for Unexhausted?"

"Of course. We always have. I don't know that it'll be a deadly sum in his case, though;" and I smiled, for it was well known that Kirkwood starved his land, and this had caused many a quarrel between him and the factor.

"That's maybe whaur ye're wrang, Mr. Bryce. I shouldna wonder if it's the biggest amount ye ever paid to an ootgoin'

tenant."

"Nonsense. Everybody knows Kirkwood isn't good to his place."

"Ay, but there's tricks in a' trades," said the fellow with

a wink. "Ye'll get a surprise when settlin'-day comes."

" How?"

"D'ye ken what the auld — is daein'? Him and Mackinlay's workin' in Co. And a' Mackinlay's stuff is got in Kirkwood's name. So ye'll hae that to pay for as weel as auld Kirkwood's."

I was confounded at the news.

"You don't mean that?" I said at last; and when he only smiled with sly importance, I inquired, "How do you come to know?"

"Because I'm handlin' the stuff."

He explained that he was at present a shed-porter at the goods station, and had his suspicions awakened by noticing that Big Pate's carts sometimes came to lift Kirkwood's bags. After that he looked every consignment and found that nothing came in Big Pate's name.

"This is important," I said, when I had satisfied myself that there was ground for the charge; "and if we find the thing correct, I can promise that you'll have something hand

some for informing us."

"It's no for that I'm doin' it, as you ken, Mr. Bryce. I

want that black devil punished, and if I see that I'll no quarrel about reward."

I promised him satisfaction there too.

"We'll need to prove our case, though," I pointed out, and I arranged with him to get information when the next con-

signment arrived and have it followed.

Big Pate was certainly no credit to Lowis. He was drinking heavily and neglecting his farm. His wife had even a worse name; she had frequent drinking-spates, it was said; encouraged men about the place, well-to-do farmers, dealers, and the like, till the house was no better than a brothel. Meiklejohn vowed he would take this chance to "scale the byke."

My pride would not let me visit at Aletown. When I had been a full week home, a note came one morning in the familiar

hand:

" DEAR JIM,

"We thought you would be over before this. You might come this evening about seven.

"Your own

"NINA."

What joy from those few words! What sighs of satisfaction did I draw that afternoon! Though I remarked the feminine artifice in the invitation. The notice was so short that I could not have declined by letter even had I wanted. I did not want. Never had I approached the bank-house with such a thumping heart. It was Mrs. Fleming who received me, and I was talking with her some time ere Nina appeared.

"Papa 'll want to see you," my sweetheart said. "I'll take him up," she added, turning to her mother, who left us.

As soon as we were alone, Nina came over and offered her mouth.

"Why have you stayed so long away, Jim?" she asked in tender reproach.

"I wasn't sure I'd be welcome."

"Oh, Jim! if you only knew how I have longed for you! Jim, will you forgive me for what I said? It was very wicked of me. I don't know what tempted me to do it. I have been miserable since."

She alluded, I knew, to the "toady" remark.

"Don't think anything more about it, dear," I said, as I held her and kissed her. Yet the sore was festering, even if the pain was not so keen.

"Jim," my sweetheart began, when we had stood a while silent, clasped in each other's arms, "were you wearying for

I nodded.

"Very much?"

"More than I can tell you."

"Oh, Jim, it was horrible! I couldn't have borne it much longer. Jim, if I hadn't written, would you have stayed away altogether?"

"Perhaps," I said with a smile.

"Oh, you wouldn't, Jim. Say you wouldn't."

"I'm not so sure. I didn't know that I was wanted back."
"Say you wouldn't, Jim. Tell me, dearest, you wouldn't."

"No, my own darling, I wouldn't; indeed, I couldn't. I must have come to you whether you had asked me or not."

After some more tender talk Nina took me up to the library, where I had the pleasure of presenting the banker with his hero's letters. They were the only ones he had seen except in museums. He handled them with reverent care, gazed at them like a worshipper at an idol.

"And his hand actually rested there!" he mused, drawing

his own across the paper.

There were three letters altogether. Two had been written in answer to Atkinson's request for guidance. They counselled him to do his present work faithfully and look out for a chance of making an independent living in the country. The third was interesting. It was on the sex-question, a subject Carlyle has said little about in his books. I gathered that Atkinson had not been long married and was finding his wife a drag on him in his efforts to live after his convictions. Carlyle said the sex-relationship received undue importance in these days; men had lost sight of the truth, which was, that woman was meant to be a help to them in leading the true life. The banker read the letters aloud, and his business experience enabled him to make out the crabbed scrawl with ease. As he read the passage about the ideal marriage, Nina and I exchanged smiling glances, though it was merely the ordinary views of the relationship that charmed us then.

At least I can say so for myself. The question whether we were to help one another in leading a heroic life was not in my

thoughts.

So the old tender tie held us once more; love-verses flowed again from my pen and were sung to me by my darling; best of all, I had again some one to share my troubles with. On some things, the Cambuslochan affair, for instance, I could talk to no other. I knew that the net was being drawn round my friend, and that Meiklejohn was as eager for the capture as the admiral. I was as eager for the escape, and it looked as if I should have my wish. After a trial which was bound to be costly, for many experts were called, Ralston got the verdict. He was elated. Now that his patent had a chance it would lift him clear of his difficulties. Nina and I rejoiced too, though in secret; Meiklejohn and his employer were so keenly disappointed that I should have fared ill had

they suspected where my sympathies lay.

So the winter went on, and at Christmas the admiral, who was again spending much of his time at Lowis, was entertaining his elder daughter and her husband. Reggie was home from Oxford, and it would be for his sake, I presume, that I was asked to dine at the house on the last night but one of the year. The only other guest was Mr. Lyon from Claygate, who was through, I had heard, for business reasons. A strike was on at his works and he was in constant communication with the admiral. This was the dispute. The Claygate fire-clay miners, aware that trade was brisk and prices high, had demanded a rise of a halfpenny an hour. The rest of the directors, the admiral amongst them, were not averse to a rise of, say, a farthing; Mr. Lyon was, mainly because the miners had lately joined a Union, the Coal-miners' Union of the county, and had preferred their claim through an agent. He met the claim by the threat of a reduction of a halfpenny per hour, hoping presumably that things would ultimately be left as they were. The company had introduced new plant and must, he alleged, study economy in the meantime. The men reduced their demand to a farthing and prepared a statement showing what a trifling inroad this would make on the company's dividends. Mr. Lyon was not the man to yield, at least to his employees, and the strike took place. At the dinner that night little was said on the subject though Mr. Lyon was, as usual, the chief talker. Only, when some remark about the flowers on the table had led Mrs. Seton to say that they meant to rearrange and extend their hot-houses, Reggie said to his father.

"You won't be able to afford that, if there's no dividend

owing to the strike."

"And Mr. Lyon here will be harder hit still, with another mouth to feed," said the admiral.

A son had been born to Mr. Lyon a few days before. "How is baby getting on?" asked Mrs. Matthias-James, who was nursing her third child.

Mr. Lyon informed her that the little chap was a young

Samson.

"What name are you giving him?" Mrs. Matthias-

James inquired.

"We settled that before he came," Mr. Lyon said. "My wife and I named him Theodore. If it had been a girl, she should have been Dorothy. We had a capital joke about that," he rattled on in his loud voice. "When he was born, I wired off to my sister in London, 'Theodore Lyon has arrived.' She couldn't make out who Theodore Lyon was, and she puzzled herself ever so long guessing what friend of ours of that name could have arrived from abroad. Haw, haw, haw!"

We did not sit long after the ladies left. Mr. Lyon took no wine, and the admiral's son-in-law did not hide his impatience at the manufacturer's talk and all his ways. The admiral soon led us to the picture-gallery where coffee was to be served. This was a place I never visited if I could help it. Ever since the ploughmen's treat five years ago I felt a sinking at the heart whenever the gallery was mentioned. While the rest of the company were strolling about, commenting on the pictures, I watched the exotic birds, and at last sat down on a bench to look at them more closely. Mr. Lyon was evidently not a connoisseur; he soon left the ladies' company and sat down beside me, his coffee in his hand.

"Very hot here," he remarked crossly and with a frowning

brow, which he proceeded to mop.

His company was not welcome. I knew of his aggressive religiosity and was afraid he might begin with it on me. If he did, I might not have patience to treat him civilly. However, he had another purpose.

"You won't have got any word yet about going through to

Clavgate?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Is there something to be done there?" "It's that fellow Baird; he's giving us trouble again.

You know the house where our manager stays?"

"Yes; the brick house, you mean, standing clear of the

village?"

"Yes. It's just on the edge of one of Baird's fields. Well, Baird has made a coup in that corner of the field, right under Lockhart's windows. To let you understand: he has a contract for the city ashpits; well, he brings the stuff out by rail and dumps it there. The smell's enough to breed a pestilence. Lockhart approached him civilly on the subject, but he merely took his fun off him, said the coup must be there as that was the spot handiest to the railway. That's not the reason. Any part of the farm would do as well, for the stuff has to be carted all over at any rate. It's spite; Baird has never forgiven us for proving him in the wrong about the new road. And here's what shows it's nothing but spite: this is the first year that Baird has made the coup there; before that it was away from the houses altogether."

"So somebody is to go through and see it?"

"You are. Admiral Seton will be speaking to you about it. It would have been seen to before now, but this strike has put other things in the background."

"Yes," I remarked carelessly; "but I suppose it won't be

long now till it collapses. I see by the papers-"

He interrupted me, straightening himself up and speaking

with new energy:

"I don't want it to collapse," and he struck the arm of the bench with his fist; "I want the strikers to hold out to the last; I want them to hold out till they haven't a penny; I hope they'll hold out till they're starving. Once they really feel the pinch, it'll teach them a lesson. They won't be in such a hurry to strike again."

The outburst so astounded me that I could only gape. When I did find my tongue I mumbled something about strikes never doing much good. His passion was not yet spent.

"They do this much good," and he spoke with the utmost vehemence; "they'll show working-people that they're cutting their own throats. Very soon those strikers will be going round the country begging. I only hope the public won't be soft enough to help them. If they're allowed to starve, they won't forget it."

Merely for the sake of saying something I observed that it

was the wives and families one felt sorry for.

"They should think of that before they come out," he rejoined as fiercely as ever. "They can't expect to leave good work and have their wives and children kept by the public. And some of the wives are as bad as the men themselves; they egged on the strike."

The brutality of the man, a philanthropist and evangelist too, turned me sick. I knew well enough that plenty of his class had the same sentiments; but they hid them, and that

was something. I positively could not utter a word.

However, the admiral had drawn near, wondering, no doubt, what had wrought his guest to such fury, and he had heard enough to know that we were talking of the strike.

"Working-people are very foolish," he said, as he stood opposite us; "their own worst enemies;" and he gave his

head a jerk at every word.

"It's a case of carrying the full cup," the manufacturer went on; "but they've got the wrong sow by the ear this time. I'm Lyon by name, and they'll find I can be Lyon by

nature;" and he clenched his mouth like a rat-trap.

The very mixture of metaphors increased my disgust of the man, perhaps by showing up his vulgarity and ignorance. "Regardless of appearances," as Miss Maymie would have said, I got up and made to join Reggie and his brother-inlaw, though the company of the latter, a most supercilious gentleman, was noway agreeable to me, and my company, I knew, was not desired by Reggie. Ever since his first term at Oxford Reggie had entirely changed in his attitude to me. Our companionship was at an end, and I had the feeling that he looked on me with something like contempt. Why, I could not understand. Reggie, at this period, had not fallen in with his father's ambitions. His great desire, as I sometimes heard from Meiklejohn, with whom he was very confidential, was to be an explorer; the late Lord Dunmore was his hero. Already he had been round the world, missing a University term for the sake of the trip. Admiral Seton had prayed that his son might never be a home-bird; the prayer was like being answered, though hardly, perhaps, as the admiral meant.

## CHAPTER XXVII

T was a dull, still January afternoon when I was set down on Claygate platform and looked once more over the bleached bent, the dark stunted heath, the brown peat, the stagnant pools and goats. I shook my head and felt thankful that I lived far from such a dreary waste. Glancing to the village I noticed that the black smoke was surging from the stacks as if no check to trade had ever been known. While I stood passing a word with the stationmaster, who evidently recollected me, the music of a brass band came from the distance. The stationmaster explained that the strikers were playing in neighbouring villages to raise funds. His sneering tone showed, and was perhaps meant to show, that his sympathies were not with them.

that his sympathies were not with them.
"You've surely extra police," I remarked, indicating three constables on the overbridge. "Has there been rioting?"

"No; but it's best to be cautious. New men are coming

every day and the strikers are not too well pleased."

At the office I found Mr. Lyon; he seemed as energetic as ever. I was again invited to stay the night, and this time I declined at once.

"Will you need a guide?" he asked, and I admitted that Mr. Rankin might be handy. I had not observed Rankin in the outer office and I was afraid he might be travelling.

"He'll be back from dinner directly;" and Mr. Lyon went to the door and ordered that Rankin should be sent in when-

ever he arrived.

I had dreaded that the manufacturer would discuss the strike. He began inquiring for the admiral, for Mrs. Seton, most particularly for Mrs. Matthias-James. I gave him information he had not asked for, so anxious was I to keep him off the dreaded topic, but my small talk was nearly through when word came that Mr. Rankin was back.

The young fellow and I shook hands like life-long friends. "No bad effects of your night in Carlisle?" he asked laughing, as we started together.

"No; but I enjoyed Atkinson;" and I told my friend of the meeting with the old clogger the next morning and of the

letters he had sent.

"He's an interesting old fellow," Rankin admitted, "and he has the root of the matter in him. He doesn't mince his words either;" and he gave a laugh, in which I joined as I said.

"He was too many for Trenery. But you're in the thick of the industrial struggle here," I went on, for I was as eager to hear about the strike from a sympathetic friend as I had

been to avoid discussing it with Mr. Lyon.

"We are;" and his manner became serious. "Yes, we are and no mistake," he repeated; but he seemed to have less zest for the talk than I.

"Wasn't there something about evicting the strikers?"

I asked.

"It's done."

As he gave no sign of adding to the curt response, I inquired,

"Where are the people living?"

"There they are;" and he nodded in the direction of the main road. Some two furlongs outside the village was a row of tents and caravans which I had noticed before but had never connected with the strike.

"I thought they were shows," I said.

"That's their domicile in the meantime. The company got warrants to evict the strikers and their families, and the police came through and cleared them out."

"So they took to tents and vans?"

"Yes; the Miners' Union provided those out of their funds. Though some of the families had been outside for a day and a night before that. Luckily the weather was mild for the time of year."

"The people will be about destitute, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. Of course, there's only a fraction of them in those quarters. A lot of the men got employment elsewhere as the strike went on, and they took their families away. Then some of them gave in when they saw their chance was hopeless and the places were being filled up."

"You're getting Russian Poles, I hear?"

"We've got them. It was the only way to fill the places."

"Have you many?"

"Nearly two hundred already, and more are coming. It's going to make a change in many ways. If you had been a little earlier, you'd have seen a Russian baker's van that comes from town twice a week to supply them with rye bread."

"There'll be bad blood between them and the strikers?"

"Yes," the clerk answered; "though that'll likely die For one thing, the Poles are Catholics and the priest won't let them be molested by their co-religionists."

"What sort of erection is this?" I asked, indicating a

long wooden shed just past the works.

"That's where the Poles were lodged when they first landed, before they could get into the houses. Some policemen were stationed all night here to guard the place, though I don't know that they were needed. The unmarried Poles, those at any rate that are in no hurry to take up house, lodge here still."

We were not long of reaching the obnoxious coup, or rather its neighbourhood, for we did not venture too close.

"I suppose," my friend remarked with a laugh, "you won't

be putting your tape over it?"
"No," I said; "indeed, I hardly needed a guide this time.

I might just have followed my nose."

Rankin, who had been in America for a short time, declared that Baird was like the skunk-defending himself with the smell.

We loitered about for a while, talking more of the strike than of the business that had brought us out.

"The strike would never have a chance?" I inquired, as

we turned for the village.

"Never the shadow of a chance, once the directors made up their minds. In fact, no strike has a chance nowadays. The masters are all combined like the men, and they have the capital and can hold out. The strike is played out in every trade. It's an antiquated weapon. And the Trade Union itself is done for; it's as good as useless."

"And how do you think Labour is ever to come to its heritage, as friend Trenery put it? Or have you given up believing that it ever will?"

"I don't say that," said the young man, though I noticed an uncomfortable expression on his face; "but it's certainly not by the Union and the strike."

"How then?"

"By Labour Representation. That's the worker's only hope. If they capture Parliament, they can make laws in their own interest, can say what shall belong to themselves,

to the people."

"But old Atkinson would say that the very men they will choose to represent them and make laws for them, indeed, the very men they do choose, are not a great lot; they've neither ability nor character; they're not likely to help anybody but themselves."

"Old Atkinson isn't so far wrong as regards some of them, at any rate. We saw plenty of that in this very strike. The way the strikers were misled was incredible. How men of any intelligence didn't see through it—and, mind you, some of those miners are sharp enough—beats me to know."

"There was a lot of deception, then?" I asked.

"It was deception all through. First of all, when a strike was threatened, the labour agents persuaded our fellows to join the Coal-miners' Union. This was supposed to be a great privilege to the fire-clay miners, who had never been in a Union before. They were made to believe that with a great wealthy Union at their back, they could defy the masters. But the Coal-miners' Union reserved the right to stop the strike-allowance at any time if the funds were needed for their original members, the coal-miners."

"So that they could have held up the strikers at any

moment."

"They could. And, as a matter of fact, they were likely to do it. For, as you would see, a strike was talked of among the coal-miners and, had it taken place, the funds would all have been needed for the colliers and our men would have been cut off."

"A very precarious position," I remarked.

"Wasn't it? Well, the agents assured our men that once they were in the Union no strike would be needed; the directors would concede their terms. But the directors didn't; Mr. Lyon isn't the man to make concessions. So the strike did take place. Then the agents said, 'It's all bluff on the part of the directors. They'll cave in within a week if you only stand firm.' The men did stand firm and the company didn't cave in, as anybody that had the pleasure of Mr. Lyon's acquaintance might have known very well beforehand.

Then stories were circulated among the men of the enormous losses the company was suffering, heavy damages to be claimed for breach of contract, and so forth. A parcel of lies; for all our contracts are taken with the strike clause. Then it was said that the shareholders were pressing the directors, and would force the directors, to come to terms with the men. That was another downright lie. Fact is, shareholders and all monied people are willing to make a sacrifice rather than yield to employees. Our shareholders, so far as I heard, never gave a grumble. After five weeks of stubborn holdingout on both sides came the news that we-that the company -meant to import foreign labour. That dismayed the strikers, and I believe they'd have needed little persuasion to approach the directors and sue for peace. But what did their agents do? Assured them they had met the Poles at the wharf, had explained to the Poles, through an interpreter, what they didn't know before, that they had been brought over to fill the place of workmen on strike; the Poles at once refused to do such a dirty thing and demanded to be taken back to their own country; the agents provided funds for their return passage and the Poles were shipped home at once. That was the story told the men at their meeting one day. The next day the Poles were at work here."

"Great heavens! That's almost past belief."

"Fact all the same. After that some of the poor beggars, the more intelligent and pushing, seemed to have their eyes opened, and they made preparations for leaving the district and looking for work elsewhere. A few broke away and asked their places back. But there were plenty who took in the agents' bluff in spite of everything, and they hoped to win up to the day they were turned out of their houses."

The young fellow had spoken with a good deal of feeling.
"It's a shocking story," I remarked, when he was silent.
"The miners' agents must have known better from the first, and I should say they were to blame for the dispute ever going so far. They must have blinded the miners, for the miners knew Mr. Lyon, and, as you say, anybody who has much acquaintance with that gentleman must know that he's not the sort to be concussed by his work-people;" and I thought of his utterances in the picture-gallery, though I did not repeat them to my companion.

"That's so," Rankin said. "He's too fond of being master

himself. Once he was in the struggle he would fight it out and stick at nothing. You see! Turning women and children on to the high-road in the dead of winter!"

"Pretty hard," I observed; and partly to draw my companion out I added, "especially for a religious gentleman."

Rankin gave a sneering "Ha!" but that was all.

Maybe I should not have said what I now did. My excuse is that the two of us had spoken frankly ever since our acquaintance began; also, that I was concerned now about social questions and eager to know how others felt when forced to deal with them. A person who suspects the symptoms of a malady in himself has a morbid anxiety to question neighbours who have had it before. So I hazarded the question:

"Look here, Mr. Rankin. Don't you find it unpleasant to

be connected with men who do such things?"

I was looking at him while I spoke. It would be his business training, I suppose, that helped him to hide his feelings; a slight frown was the only sign that the subject was disagreeable.

"It is unpleasant," he admitted. "Only we can't help it so long as society is organised, or rather left unorganised, as it

is just now. We're all in it."

"More or less, no doubt. Still, with your opinions—to have to support a man who turns women and children on to

the road—" and I shook my head and gave a laugh.

"It isn't pleasant," he said again, this time in a sharp aggressive tone; "but you're in the same position. You work for a man who is a director of the company and sanctions those measures. I daresay, indeed, Admiral Seton, if he were thwarted by his ploughmen, would treat them as harshly as Mr. Lyon does his miners. At any rate, he lives in luxury off their toil."

I had provoked the blow and, I daresay, deserved it. Still, it hurt me, so sore, indeed, that I had no heart to retaliate.

"Maybe," was all I said, and we walked on for some minutes in a silence that was painful to me at least. My companion, with the tact a commercial traveller might show, turned the talk by asking if I meant to stay overnight, and nothing more was said about the strike.

"To see oorsel's as ithers see us" is not always pleasant; perhaps it seldom is pleasant. It may be useful, though.

Rankin's sharp retort was the first thing to make me think seriously about the management of the Lowis property. I had been exercised about the Wiston natives, very likely because the place and the people were strange. The condition of the Claygate workers had also interested me since my talk with Rankin at my first visit, and the brutal utterances of their master had forced me to pity them still more. Now, a chance word drew my thoughts homeward to the people I knew best, my own folk, in short. Admiral Seton, according to the clerk, was living on his ploughmen. The clerk would reason it out in this way. The rents from the Lowis farms were the foundation of the admiral's wealth, and the labour that really raised those rents was contributed by the workers on the land, the ploughmen, the cattlemen, the dairymaids, the odd labourers, male and female. The farmers, if you like, directed the work, more often they only drove on their hands, and their main function was to sell the produce for the biggest price going. Rankin was right, then; it was the labourers, to give them one convenient name, the ploughmen, who furnished the admiral with his income. How they lived I knew, for I had lived with them. A bothy or a but-and-ben cottage was their home, a pound a week their pay. For this they had to rise at half-past five in the morning and be on duty till after eight at night, for, though their working-day was ten hours, they had to feed and groom their horses before and after being out of doors, and on many farms, the Mailing for one, they visited the stables every night at eight to give their pairs a final look. Still, it was not the wearing toil, the long hours, the meagre wage, that impressed me; it was rather their dependent position. A farmer, or to go a step back, a laird, had them in his hands. Not, it is true, while the ploughman was in his best years, for a capable man of full vigour would seldom lack a situation. Though he lost one master, he could find another, if that is independence. Even this was impossible once he reached middle life. Greed for the last pennyworth of labour made the farmers dispense with a man as soon as grey hairs began to show, and the cast-off drudge, aged before his time with work and exposure, drifted into the village and trusted to casual labour for a living. most the end was the parish. On such men the admiral and his family lived, lived in luxury. These were the bowed figures that upheld his palace. Yes, Rankin's words were true.

It took time to see all this. Solitary reflection helped me; also talks with the only one I could speak freely to, my sweetheart. The first time I was over at Aletown after my Claygate visit I had told my friends about the strike and the evictions. Mr. Fleming, I recollect, listened in utter silence; the young people pited the homeless families. When Nina and I were by ourselves, she remarked on my absent manner; indeed, she had wonderful quickness in noting any unusual mood. I did not hide the cause; I repeated some of Rankin's talk, particularly the retort he had flung at me of aiding the admiral against the workers.

"That's nonsense, Jim," Nina said impatiently. "You only do your duty. Somebody has to do a factor's work on

an estate, else an estate couldn't be managed at all."

"Certainly not as it's managed at present. But I suppose Rankin would say, at least his Socialist friends would sayfor I'm not sure where he stands now-that estates shouldn't be managed as they are; they shouldn't be in private hands at all, should belong to the people, or something like that."

"Rubbish! Would that be fair to the admiral who has had the estate for ever so long, at least his people before him?"

"The question would be, How did his people get it?"

"Oh, that's too far back. They have had it for generations anyway, and it would be robbery to take it from them now."
"But——"

"But-it's quite true. So give me a kiss, Jim. You've hardly given me one to-night. Now we'll go and sing some-

thing."

But a trouble was gathering that was to perplex even my sweetheart. One Thursday in February I had just entered the mart when the principal of the firm, who must have been on the lookout for me, came up and after a word or two of greeting asked if I could look in at the office in five minutes or so.

I thought little about the request; the business would no doubt have to do with our traffic in live-stock. Five minutes

later we were seated in his office.

"Have you seen Ralston to-day?" he began.

I had not; I was newly in, I told him.

"It's about him I was wanting to see you," he said.

course, this is in the strictest confidence, Mr. Bryce."

"Certainly," I assured him, though my heart boded trouble for my poor friend.

Stevenson was a short, stout, good-looking man, somewhat over fifty, energetic and talkative. I had heard him speak on Conservative platforms, and he put as much vigour into his private conversation, talking very fast and loud. He had always been markedly affable to me, and never parted from me without leaving me well pleased with myself. That he could show another side of his character I once had amusing proof. I had dropped in to the Royal one evening for a glass of beer. No other customer was at the bar, and after I had given my order there was no talk between the waiter and myself. Voices came from the bar-parlour, and one I soon distinguished as Stevenson's. He was talking with a Menteith factor, and was pressing him to procure a neighbouring landowner's custom for the mart. The factor, who was tipsy, was promising everything. Something passed about a farmer who was in difficulties, and Stevenson said, hardening his voice to correspond to the process he was describing,

"When you've got hold of a man, squeeze him like an orange; don't let him go so long as there's a drop in him."

This was the gentleman who was now inviting me to discuss Mr. Ralston's affairs.

"Things are not bright with Ralston," he went on; "but," he said, interrupting himself, "perhaps you can tell me this, Mr. Bryce, for it'll decide whether I need say anything more or not. Is the admiral as keen as ever to get hold of Cambuslochan? He was very anxious at one time, I know."

"Well, really, Mr. Stevenson," I answered with no apparent hesitation, "I know very little of what's going on at Lowis.

I'm through in the south every week almost-"

"I know. I know how much her ladyship trusts you,"

the auctioneer interjected.

"So that I haven't the Lowis affairs at my finger-ends," I resumed. "The admiral was anxious for Cambuslochan at one time; how he feels about it now—well, Mr. Meiklejohn would be the one to know. You'd better see him," and I rose to go.

"Sit down, sit down, Mr. Bryce," said the auctioneer, making a gesture. "We'll take for granted that the admiral is in the same mind still. Now, what I want to tell you is this, Mr. Bryce: if he wants the place, now's the time to get it,

for Ralston's in a corner."

I only said, "Indeed," and he went on,

"Yes; he's in a proper hole, in fact. Of course, you know he had a case going on against a London company over that patent of his for adjusting cart-loads. The company failed, and they've practically nothing, so that Ralston is saddled with the expenses, and a thousand pounds won't clear him."

"Good gracious!"

"The lawyers don't work for nothing, Mr. Bryce. Now, Ralston bonded Cambuslochan to raise money for carrying on the case; in fact, he took a second bond on it, for there was a mortgage on it already. And here's how he's in a fix. Just at the moment when he needs every penny to meet his expenses, the second mortgage is called up; it seems the lender needs his money."

I divined some connection between this sudden call and the

admiral's desire for Cambuslochan.

"That's bad," I managed to say.

Stevenson continued, "So he's jammed, unless indeed he falls in with some other body that'll advance the money. And he hasn't long to find them."

"There's no hope of the lender giving him time?" I

asked.

"He doesn't think-I mean, there's no likelihood of that. But to come to the point. Ralston is pretty deep in our books; in fact, I could have trusted him to any amount, and it's only of late that I found he was hard up. Now, if it'll help your folks to get his place, I'll lay him on his back to-morrow."

I was certain ere this who was his informant. Mr. Ralston had been pressed for a settlement and, taking the auctioneer for a friend, had told him about his affairs. That Stevenson should trade on information so obtained I might have doubted but for the words I had overheard in the Royal bar. The sickening disgust I had once felt at the brutality of the Claygate manufacturer came over me once more.

"So if you bring my proposal before Mr. Meiklejohn or the admiral at once and let me know, I'll see that Cambuslochan drops into the admiral's mouth like a ripe plum. I should say the admiral 'll be very pleased to hear the news. Don't you think so, Mr. Bryce?"

. I was in sore perplexity. To refuse would bring me into trouble, and for that I was not ready; to comply was to hasten my friend's ruin. Yet I was versed enough in business tactics to be able to hide my feelings.

"Well, Mr. Stevenson," I said, rising as I spoke, "it's an affair I don't know much about, as I explained to you already. Your plan is to mention it to Meiklejohn direct-if-if you think it best to mention it," I added, for even the last suggestion seemed an aid lent to my friend's downfall.

"I certainly think it should be mentioned," said the auctioneer, with a shade of surprise, it seemed to me, in his tone and look. "Don't you think so yourself, Mr. Bryce? Doesn't

this look the very chance your people need?"
"Well, yes—possibly," I stammered.

"For it just comes to this: if Ralston escapes this time, he may rally, you never know how, and the admiral may have to wait long enough for such another chance, if he ever gets it at all."

"Well, that's your plan, Mr. Stevenson," I said in as decided a tone as I could command. "If you're quite satisfied that—that things are as you say, you had better speak to Meiklejohn, and——"

"You'll broach it, though," Stevenson, interrupted with

a deprecating gesture.

"But I'll have to run," I went on, pulling out my watch,

and with a "Good-day" I hurried from the office.

Stevenson kept talking as I made my escape, but his words, though they fell on my ears, did not reach my disordered mind.

In my excitement I had only one wish-to be clear of the mart at once. There was no business, indeed, to keep me: I had come into Craigkenneth that day from mere habit. The thought came to me that I might run down to Aletown and share my trouble with Nina. As I was making for the street, Mr. Ralston, who was standing in a group, hailed me. I could hardly trust my senses when I saw from his look and manner that he was flushed with liquor. Ralston was a most abstemious man, and the only thing I had heard him boast about was that he had never come out of his trap on a marketday without being able to walk in a straight line. My feeling was horror. I only stood with him a few seconds, then made for the gate.

"What's the hurry?" he called in boisterous tones. "Hold on! I'll be there directly;" but I only waved my

hand and hurried out.

For a minute or two I kept my hard pace, thankful for the

escape. Then doubts began to pester me. If my friend remained in the mart, he would drink more and be talked about. Probably he would blab his affairs and hurt himself; yet this was not what affected me most, it was rather the thought of my friend, so respectable, so gentlemanly, making a fool of himself. But then, if I meddled, it would be risky; Stevenson would certainly be told. I held on. Then the thought of the young wife at Cambuslochan, of little Bab and Harriet, came to my mind; my pace slackened, I stopped, after a second or two I turned and—though with no very resolute or eager step—made for the mart.

The knot of farmers was still near the gate, though it was somewhat changed. My friend was not in it. As I glanced about, one of the group asked if I was looking for Ralston, and he directed me to the refreshment-rooms. There was a noisy crowd inside, but I could tell Ralston's voice above all the din. On observing me he made a sweeping gesture of welcome

and cleared a space for me at his side.

"Thought you were off, never to see you more, 'off to Alabama with my banjo on my knee.' Maggie! Katie! A

half for this gentleman."

Though I knew the importance of humouring him, I protested I could drink nothing. The mart whisky was poison; besides, I had to keep my head. Ralston would not be denied, and the barmaid, who had waited for one of us to yield, proceeded to fill up a glass from a bottle on the counter. As she emptied it into a tumbler, she made me a sign with her eyebrows, and on adding water and tasting the mixture I found she had supplied me with lime-juice. Thanking her with a

look, I listened to my friend.

"Smart boy, this," he was going on, indicating me to his neighbours; "cleverest hands in the county, bar none; draw you anything while you wait; draw your pretty face, Katie, for a kiss. Yes, and a good sort too; I don't give a damn who talks against him. Yes, Jim; there's plenty have a lot to say about you, but I'll stand up for you as long as I've a leg to stand on. Damned bad lot you're in with, but I never saw anything but the clean tuber in you;" and so he was running on when I interrupted him:

"Well, Mr. Ralston, you can do me a good turn. Give me a lift home. I had to let the trap go back. It's needed up

yonder."

"Damned bad lot that needs it; but you're all right, and I'll drive you anywhere you like. But for the —— old factor

or his admiral-admiral! ho! ho! "

"All right. We'll start, then, if you've nothing more to do;" but it was not so easy to move him. He was in the sociable mood that comes to some men with liquor, and the company did nothing to help me. One farmer, who had come to one of our carse farms two years back, was with Ralston now as he had been outside. He was a fellow who carried stories to Meiklejohn, and I did not care to see him keep so close to my friend.

When Ralston was out in the yard he walked almost steadily, and the only noticeable effect of the whisky was that he hailed every acquaintance and would stop to talk. On reaching the stables I gave the hostler a tip to hurry, for I was afraid Ralston might want more drink. Soon we were out. Ralston insisted on driving, and he sent the trap at a great pace through

the busy street.

On the run home he kept bragging about himself and his belongings, his pony, his turnips, his skill at bargaining—he, a man who disdained to speak of himself in his sober hours. He abused the Lowis authorities, more than once he mentioned McKerracher and muttered a curse, but he always stopped himself as if trying to keep uncomfortable thoughts away. I was doing the same. The story I had given Ralston was, of course, a fiction; my pony and trap were still at the Royal stables. I should be remarked driving home in Ralston's dogcart, and trouble might arise with my employers.

When we drove into the yard at Cambuslochan, Mrs. Ralston and the children were there to welcome us. What a look in her eyes as she turned from her husband to me! Not a word passed between the pair and she hurried the children into the house. I started to unyoke, and my friend, who was now quiet and somewhat sullen-looking, hung about me as if unwilling to face his wife alone. He asked me, indeed, to wait and I promised, but I only stayed a minute to explain to Mrs. Ralston that I was in haste. Ralston had gone to

his room, so I was able to slip away.

Instead of going home I went back to Lucas, borrowed a bicycle and rode down to the ferry. By five o'clock I was at Aletown. Nina was surprised and delighted, for she never had a visit on Thursdays, but when I told her of my

perplexity she was also troubled. I put it to her in this

way.

"If I don't tell your uncle that Stevenson spoke to med Stevenson will tell himself. If I do tell, it'll be helping them to trap Mr. Ralston. What am I to do?" When she did not speak, I went on, "Suppose it were a friend of yours that was concerned, Nina, suppose it were Miss Round, and you had information that would give others a chance to hurt her, would you give them the information?"

"No, I wouldn't," she answered promptly.

"So you think I shouldn't either?" I suggested.

"Perhaps not, Jim. The auctioneer should speak to uncle himself."

"Well, I'll leave it there. He can complain if he likes, and your uncle and the admiral must just dismiss me if they're not satisfied."

"No fear of that, Jim," she laughed.

"But isn't it disagreeable to be mixed up in such a business?"

"No doubt it is. Still, there are unpleasant things in every way of life and somebody needs to do a factor's work. And most of the things you do are quite good and useful."

"You're of old Mitchell's opinion, that a good factor is a

boon to the community."

"So he is. I'm sure, if it was other people than uncle and you that were managing the estate, they would be far harder on the tenants."

We left the question as settled and the rest of the evening was given to pleasanter talk. I could not wait overnight, for the pony and trap were still at Craigkenneth. It was late when I drove up the Lang Stracht, and as I passed Cambuslochan, now quiet and dark, I felt that my heart would have been heavier had I joined the plot against my poor friends.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

Y interview with Stevenson had an effect he could not have anticipated and I cannot explain. That it should have shown me the false relations between the big landlord and the small, Ahab and Naboth; that it should have made me feel more keenly than ever how degrading was the work of a landlord's tool—all this was to be expected. Here is the curious thing: from that market-day the condition of the working-people was my one concern. How could their subjection to a game-preserving landlord or a "Captain of Industry" be ended? How could they become free? The thought haunted me as years before I had been haunted by Miss Maymie's image. I felt it as the undercurrent of the mind even while I was at my duties, and when I was free it brimmed over. My own position, my own future, ceased to concern me. What might happen if Stevenson told the admiral of our interview gave me no care.

It was from Mr. Ralston himself that I next heard about the Cambuslochan affair. About a week after, as I was going up the Lang Stracht one evening, he stopped me at the gate and asked me in. I excused myself, though we stood a while

talking.

"I say, James," he said abruptly, "I'm afraid I made an ass of myself last Thursday. It was very good of you to look after me." When I laughed it off, he continued, "I had been upset by business matters and took the readiest means to forget them." Then he went on to tell me what I knew already: the London company had failed and he would have his own law expenses to meet; the bond on his property had been called up, and it was doubtful if he could raise the sum elsewhere; people who could afford to wait for their money were pressing him. "How it'll all end is beyond my saying," he concluded. "I'm telling you this, James, to relieve my

mind, for I can't speak of it to anybody else, can't speak of it fully even to the wife. She knows things are bad, but she doesn't know how bad."

He must have known I listened with sympathy, though I did not encourage his confidence. If I were asked about his affairs, I wanted to be able to say that I knew nothing.

Whenever I was at Aletown it was Nina's first question: had her uncle said anything about the auctioneer? I had to smile at her anxiety; she was more concerned for my prospects than I was.

I was soon able to tell her that her uncle had spoken.

She could hardly wait till I gave her the story.

"What did he say?"

"He told me first of all that Ralston was pressed for money. Then, that he understood Stevenson had been speaking to me on the subject."

" Yes, Jim?"

I admitted he had, but I had referred him to your uncle himself. Your uncle said Stevenson had given him to understand that.

"Did uncle seem angry?"

"No. And I rather inferred that Stevenson hadn't quite given me away. Perhaps he didn't care to make an enemy of me. Anyhow, your uncle went on to say that, if the business was properly handled, he believed Ralston's place would soon fall in to Lowis."

"And what did you say, Jim?"

"Merely said Yes and No whenever I had to speak."

"What will they be meaning to do, Jim?"

"From what your uncle said I discovered a thing that had puzzled me before. I wondered why Mr. Ralston had got the second bond so easily at last when it seemed impossible for a while. I'm told now that his agents had been asked by our agents to find him the money so that he might be more thoroughly in his lawyer's power. I suppose the client whose name was given as the lender would be a mere dummy figure. Well, when Mr. Ralston gained the plea, that would rather upset their calculations; but when the London company failed, that suited them perfectly. McKerracher would get instructions at once to call up the mortgage. Then Stevenson must needs make things worse for poor Ralston by pressing him for a settlement of their account. The funny thing is

that they don't really need to do the admiral's dirty work, for they have all his custom as it is; only there are some people that must truckle to the great and kick the poor fellow that's done."

"It's really not nice the way Mr. Ralston has been used,"

Nina said.

"No, it's not nice," I assented with a bitter laugh. "But that's what factors and lawyers are for—to do not nice things for their employers."

"Oh no, Jim," she protested.

"It's true. I'm speaking from experience. What do you think a factor is kept for, Nina?"

"To manage the estate, of course; let farms and so on."

"Quite a mistake, my dear girl. A landlord could often do that himself quite easily, on a small estate, at any rate. The factor is kept to do the dirty work—screw up tenants' rents, dismiss old workers, plot and scheme for getting small properties like this of Mr. Ralston's. If a landlord had to manage his own estate and come face to face with all the poverty and hardship on it, and had to do all the cruel and unjust things himself, that would take away the pleasure. He shuts his eyes to that, though in most cases he knows there is hardship and cruelty; he shuts his eyes and pays a factor to do the cruel things."

"That's your imagination, Jim. I don't believe a word

of it."

"It's true," I maintained. "I can see, too, it's the same in business. Commercial travellers will be kept to do the dirty work of the firm, compete for orders, wheedle customers, bully debtors, and so forth. If the principal had to do all this, it would spoil his enjoyment of the profits. And so Mr. Lyon of Claygate makes my friend Rankin travel for him. Though I must say Mr. Lyon doesn't strike me as a man who would be squeamish."

"That's all rubbish you're talking, Jim."

" It's truth."

"It's rubbish. For a traveller's work is to get orders for his firm, and a factor's is to see that everything is kept right on the estate. And they don't need to lie and cheat and be cruel. They may be quite honourable men."

"A boon to the community," I laughed.

"Well, yes, they may be. For instance, the admiral might

have factors who would be far harder on the people than uncle and you are."

I shook my head, but as usual left her the last word.

Long afterwards, quite recently indeed, and most of all since I started writing my history, I have thought of this and similar conversations, and felt that they must have been trying to poor Nina. She may have feared that I was set against my work by the name "toady" she had once flung in my face. Had that been so, it would have been paying back a sharp and maybe light word with heavy interest.

How could working-people be set free? The question was with me always. My torture was not so acute out of doors, for Nature still interested me, and the sight of a flock of golden plover sweeping over the open fields, or of a solitary creeper hopping up the trunk of some young oak in the Satter Wood, made me forget all else for the time. So welcome was the relief that I would go out even in office-hours when my distress was growing unbearable. For excuse I told Meiklejohn that a feeling of sickness came over me now and then and the fresh air did me good. He would recollect, I suppose, that I had been troubled in this way some years before, and would attribute the weakness to the old cause, my ill-usage at the Mailing. Anyhow, he enjoined me to go out for a stroll whenever I felt the need.

Worst of all was the "two-o'clock-in-the-morning" struggle. When I woke after my first sleep the terror would start, and soon mastered me. All blackness! No hope for the world, the world indeed getting worse, and I helping in the evil work and bound to help the more as more power came into my hands. Many a thought-haunted soul, I daresay, has dreaded the turn of the night. It is at that hour that the spectre we would fain forget rises and triumphs over our helplessness. Once my fear grew so awful that it was driving me mad, and to save my senses I threw on some clothes and rushed out of doors as if chased for my life. For minutes after I was in the open air I knew nothing distinctly, and it was only the rustling of pheasants among spruce-boughs that restored me to myself and taught me that I was at the Den. After that I flew to this refuge when assailed at the dark hours. How often have I wandered the country roads or the trackless woods hours before the first labourer was astir! Two nights, above all, return to me. One was frosty and

clear, the full moon so bright that it made the stars mere points of sparkling light. I was on the road beside the Dale Planting, a small wood not far from the Mailing farm, the very wood, indeed, where I buried the pheasant's feathers long, long ago. The night was exceedingly quiet, with the silence that I have often remarked in time of frost. Suddenly on the still night air rose a wild piercing shriek, "Pee-ee-ee-ee-eeah!" several times repeated. It thrilled me like a cry of "Murder!" on a lonely street. Only for an instant, however; the next, I recognised it for the cry of a wild creature in distress. Guided by the cry that was renewed at intervals I made towards the middle of the wood, and at last caught the sound of a scuffle and rattle. I struck a match and had just time to see a rabbit plunging into a hole, dragging a trap behind. With some difficulty I hauled the trap out and got my foot on the spring. The moment the iron teeth relaxed their clench, the rabbit whipped out its bleeding hind-leg and vanished in the burrow. The little adventure lightened my gloom.

The other night was strangely different. For a week a storm had raged, the hurricane sometimes lulling by day but invariably rising at night. This night it was at its wildest. Our little lodge, though low and sheltered, seemed beset by a host trying to force doors and windows in, and the boom of the south-wester as it struck the walls was like a thunderclap. I went out an hour before midnight and wandered up the west avenue and on to the walks above the house. You would have thought the dark woods were alive with people; the air was full of roaring, whispering, sobbing, whistling, soughing, swishing, with at times the crashing and rending of boughs. Near the burn, that I could hear rushing and splashing and gurgling, my cap was swept high in air and would find, I daresay, a watery grave. As I was returning after a wild wandering of two hours, the sleet was like to cut my cheeks open, the wind rushing down the glades tossed me about, and at every step I was tripped with fallen branches. The last part of the journey was made in a daze; my head was dizzy, I staggered as if drunk. Yet the rage of the storm had calmed my anguish somewhat, for on reaching home I was able to sleep.

As spring advanced and dawn began to gain on the dark,

there was more to relieve my sombre thoughts.

Interesting it was to see the farm or cottage chimneys beginning to smoke. Lowis Mains was invariably the first, the Mailing was usually the last among the dairy farms. If I was late of returning, I would meet some country worker or maybe a keeper. They would conclude, I suppose, that I was on the prowl. Had I been, there was plenty to see. Once, near the spot where I had spied little Colina, I came on Nisbet bending beneath a huge sack. He heaved it among the bushes on seeing me, and when I came up he was too confused to answer my greeting. I was embarrassed also, and to carry off the awkwardness I remarked that I was out to see if the swallows had come yet. They often appeared about that date, the twentieth of April.

"I saw the first one just now," he said eagerly, "over at the Maiden's Rest. Only one, though. If you go across

you'll very likely see it."

I did go round, but saw no swallow. The keeper's story may have been false, made up to get me away. For some time after he was uncomfortable-looking whenever we met. I did not inform on him or even look into the affair; such things did not concern me now; gloomy despair was closing me in. I sought the help of drink and tobacco. The smoking did soothe me, I daresay, and the whisky, which I took at bedtime, procured me a few hours' sleep. Then would come the night-agony which the reaction perhaps aggravated. To one in mental torment drink is a fearful temptation. It makes us forget—for the time; it gives us sleep—also for the time. Free and continued indulgence deadens the very sense of suffering; only it deadens the sense of so much else. Certainly, I was like to become a drunkard.

One afternoon late in April I was in Craigkenneth making the round of the Royal Park, for golf was one of my allies against the invisible foe. As I was about to cross to the club-house for my cycle, I passed a group of loafers seated on the bench at the park gate. One rose and stopped me. It was Liddell.

"I say, Mr.-Mr. Bryce; ye're aye keepin' yer eye on

that --- ? When are ye gaun to nick him?"

The fellow was pretty drunk. I had forgotten him and Big Pate and our schemes of vengeance; I did not even know if Meiklejohn was keeping watch on Mackinlay and his neighbour. However, to get clear of the fellow I assured him that Mackinlay was not lost sight of.

"No, by God! he'll no be lost sicht o'. By God! I'll tear his liver oot;" and he uttered the most sickening curses, declaring, to end with, that he was content to burn in the pit to-morrow if he saw his enemy burning five minutes before him.

Though I had edged him away from his mates I could not shake him off or even get on to the road. I asked if he wasn't

at the railway sheds now.

He gave a wild laugh of scorn, and with fresh curses informed

me that More had sacked him for letting a box down.

"Said I was drunk. Damned lie! I can take a hauf, Mr.—Mr. Bryce, you ken; I've haen twa three haufs the day. But I was as sober as you are that day; strike me deid if I wasna. And the auld —— gied me the road. But I can lauch at them a'. I'll mak' a livin' oot among their feet. D'ye ken what I'll dae, Mr.—Mr. Bryce? I'll be a —— detective. God's truth! I'll spy on folk and get hush-money. D'ye see that big fellow wi' the pock-marked face? He lives that way. He watches folk gaun into hooses in the Wynd, and as sune 's they come oot it's 'Hauf-a-croon or I'll expose ye.' Easier than haudin' a ploo, ay, or liftin' boxes, Mr.—Mr. Bryce."

Ere this I had got out of the park and across the road, with him hanging on to me, and I now escaped by slipping him a shilling. I was shocked at the change in the man. Only a year or two ago and he was a sober, industrious workman: now he was a monster. My horror was the greater, I doubt not, from a hidden consciousness that I had helped to make him what he was. To what lengths the mania of hate will drive its victim! My connection with Big Pate and Liddell had already shown me that any person, if watched closely enough, will give openings for attack. I now saw the other side. The hunter suffers as well as his prey; in a different

way, certainly, but perhaps a worse.

The encounter affected me deeply, serious as were my other troubles at the time. The spectacle of the drunken degraded wretch turned me against drink. If I should become such a being! I can be firm in some things and I resolved that drink should not make me its victim. I allowed myself a glass of beer at dinner and a small whisky at bedtime; not another drop did I touch when alone.

Love, and woman's love especially, has a keen eye. Nina

had seen for a while that I was not myself. She spoke to me, prescribed rest, change, and the common specifics we recommend our friends; above all, she hinted plainly that someone closer than my old landlady was needed to take care of me. Though my talk should have taught her that I was greatly exercised about the relation of rich and poor, Nina did not seem to understand that this might be my trouble. Perhaps few women can believe that any general question of the sort can unsettle a man. Most will fancy the cause must be something personal—ill-health, bereavement, disappointed love, or the like. Nina was convinced it was ill-health with me, the effect of ill-usage in boyhood, and she kept urging me to see a doctor, their own doctor by preference. Making full allowance for her sex, I still wonder that her feelings had so little in common with mine. One thing she said that I can never forget. I had been telling her about a new reservoir that was to be made up the moorlands; the admiral demanded six thousand pounds for a small piece of hill pasture let at five shillings the acre.

"Well, but the land is his," Nina said.

"Why is it his?" I asked.

"Because his people left it to him."

"Who gave it them to leave?"

"Oh, Jim, that's going too far back. Besides, they bought some of it. I've heard uncle say they bought a lot of the carse land and paid far too much for it too."

"I know. They bought it from the Forresters. Who gave

the Forresters the right to own it and sell it?"

"Oh, Jim, shut up! You know you're talking rubbish."

"I mean it, Nina. I see that there's something far wrong in allowing one person to have so much land and do as he likes with it. I don't know what should be done to change the thing, but I should like to see something done."

"Jim," she said earnestly, "don't you say such things. Do you know, Jim, if I thought you were going that way

I'd rather see you dead."

The Ralstons had few chances of seeing me, for I kept away from their house. So I was not prepared for Mr. Ralston greeting me as he did one afternoon when we met on the Craigkenneth road.

"My wife is in a state about you, James. She saw you in Craigkenneth last Thursday and came home quite upset.

Said you were like a ghost. And it's a fact that you're not looking yourself. By Jove! if you were in my shoes I could understand it. But a young fellow like you, with no worries, should have more red in his cheek. Have you seen Finlay? Youngsters are apt to neglect themselves and think they can stand anything. You're run down a little, and you should

look after yourself at once."

I was touched to see that my friends, with all their own troubles to vex them, could spare a thought for another. In this way, too, their kindness was a comfort: it showed they never doubted me. Though I was associating daily with the men that were scheming against them, this pair knew that I was not in the plot. Sometimes I have been charged with things I was clear of; sometimes, more seldom though, I have had credit I did not deserve; here I got justice. How rare that is most men know.

The net was closing on my poor friend. His powerful neighbour had advised the auctioneer to give Ralston a respite. McKerracher's people had also found that the bondholder was prepared to wait. Meanwhile they urged their client to take the admiral's offer; it was his one chance of escaping bankruptcy. With a man of Ralston's character this consideration would be weighty; but he had come to suspect that his agents were betraying him, and he declared his readiness to face bankruptcy rather than part with his place at the figure. Here was a turn quite unlooked for. Certainly, the admiral's offer-£4,000 for a farm of sixty acreswas good market-value. Ralston asked £100 per acre over head and would look at nothing less. It was no secret by this time that Cambuslochan was likely to change hands, and rumours of all sorts were abroad: the admiral had bought it. the admiral had given up the fancy for it, and so on. Now a disquieting story of a different sort was running the countryside: a fruit-grower from Sparkwell, a place two or three miles to the west of Craigkenneth, had his eye on it for a fruit-farm. It was certainly true that this grower had been at Cambuslochan and had gone over the ground; I knew, too, that Meiklejohn was aware of the visit. One morning he handed me a letter forwarded from Sawers. It was from Ralston in answer to a renewed offer for Cambuslochan. Ralston begged to inform them that if any letter reached him in future offering less than the sum he had fixed, namely,

£100 per acre, he would not acknowledge it; also, any communication relating to this matter must be directed to himself and not to his solicitors.

"Do you know, James if, Cowbrough of Sparkwell is putting in for the place?" he asked.

I could answer truthfully that I did not know.

"That looks as if Ralston had other offers," said the factor with a very sour face; "he's so very independent. Wouldn't you take that out of the letter?"

I admitted it was possible, and Meiklejohn then mentioned, what I already knew, that Cowbrough had been

In my light-hearted days I should have chuckled at my old chief's perplexity; now I was too sore burdened, and this business was not to close till a further load was thrown on me that was like to crush me to the ground.

Admiral Seton would visit the office twice and thrice a day at this period, and one afternoon, when he had been closeted

with Meiklejohn for half an hour, I was called in.

"We've some business for you here, James," the admiral jerked out. "I've made up my mind to buy Cambuslochan, and the only question is, how to buy it on the best terms. Now, we both think that you have the tact to manage the affair, and here's what you've to do. Show him that paper. Meiklejohn," he went on, addressing the factor—" yes. Just look over that, James."

The slip of paper, in the factor's writing, was to this effect: "I hereby agree to sell my property of Cambuslochan to

Admiral Seton for the sum of——"

"You see, James," the admiral continued, "the space for the figure is left blank, and this is where your tact will be shown. I've already offered Ralston four thousand pounds for the place. You repeat that offer, and if you can persuade him to close with it fill up the blank and have the paper signed on the spot. If he absolutely refuses and you see persuasion is useless, increase the figure a little, by fifties, say, at a time, always giving him to understand that every offer is the final one. Then leave him with that a while. Then if -as I hope and trust will not be the case-but if he sticks for the ridiculous sum, £100 per acre, he has already asked, give him it and be done with it. But remember this, James: the matter is to be settled before you leave him. Settle

it for as low a figure as you can; but don't part with him till it is settled. Now, you understand, James?"

I could not utter a word. Meiklejohn suggested to his

employer,

"You spoke of having it settled to-night, sir."

"True. I want it settled to-night, James. Go down to Ralston's this evening, just in a friendly way, as if for a chat. Bring the talk round to the sale, as I've no doubt you'll be able to do very nicely, and clinch the thing. I'm tired of waiting; indeed, any delay now might interfere with my plans. So you have it settled this very evening, James."

By this I had rallied enough to make an attempt at escape. Why did I not say outright, "No. Do your dirty work yourself?" Alas, alas! What I did say, with a sickly smile

and lame utterance, was,

"I'm afraid, sir, I couldn't make a very good business of it. Wouldn't it be better to give it to someone with more experience and—and more skill at—at that kind of work?"

I had ventured a glance at the factor, and he promptly

answered it in his quiet, serious way:

"No, James. You remember that letter of Ralston's declaring that he wouldn't listen to any of our business people who made him a lower offer. So he can only be approached in a friendly way, and I'm quite sure, as Admiral Seton says, that if he can be handled at all you are the one to do it."

"No doubt of it. And I'll be down first thing to-morrow to hear the result;" and the admiral gave me a nod to intimate

that the conference was over.

Seated at my desk, I tried to compose my disordered thoughts. If I had received a staggering blow I could not have been more helpless. In a few minutes the admiral came out of Meiklejohn's room and passed us with a cheery "Good-day," and my brain was still in a whirl. As I grew calmer, there rose again and again the suggestion, "Tell Meiklejohn you refuse to go," and all the while I knew that the words would never be spoken. Meiklejohn went off before five, leaving me to lock up, and I said to myself that when the lads were gone I should consider the affair in solitude and come to some resolve. The delay brought me no rest; I kept pacing the floor even after I saw from the lads' glances that they remarked my agitation. When they did leave I sat down determined to think strenuously of some escape,

but such wild fancies thronged on me that I had to lock the office and rush out in a panic. I turned to the woods, though, for anything I noted there, I might as well have been deaf and blind. When I woke from my stupor I was standing at the Maiden's Rest. It was the season when the place would be at its sweetest, and I do recall that there was sunlight on the water and that the wild-fowl were swarming. But this was known only as in a dream. The woodland lake seemed no longer a nook to be haunted for its beauty: it had another use and meaning. The thought insinuated itself among my disordered fancies, like an adder lifting its head above the heath, "Is not this the escape? Is not this the way a coward can get out of it all?" And as the great gulf of space into which they look down tempts the weakheaded to throw themselves from the tops of towers, so the tranquil waters fascinated me and were drawing me in, till by a supreme effort I turned and fled. Even as I hurried away I remembered, in spite of myself, how, years before, the same lone spot had seemed to promise me refuge, and the awful question would rise, Was this my fate? Was this my doom, the doom there was no escaping? As I made, almost involuntarily, for home, I still knew nothing by the outward sense, but I can recall that one thought was dominant: I am a proved coward, I am no man, I am a craven who has fled from battle. My old landlady was at the gate looking for me, and I had to go in. I drank some tea but could not eat, and Mrs. Paterson, when she came in to clear the table, asked if there was anything wrong.

I told her I wasn't hungry, that was all.

"You're looking far from well, Mr. Bryce," said the old lady, who had been concerned about my health for some time. "Is there anything else I could make for you?"

I had never before acknowledged that anything ailed me, but now her words gave me an idea and I admitted that I was not quite myself. Her first suggestion, I knew, would be that I should go to bed. I feigned reluctance and let her urge me; at last I lay down after bathing my feet in hot water and mustard, and when I was in bed she brought me gruel laced with a stiff glass of whisky. My idea was to find escape from my difficulties in shamming illness—an ignoble escape, certainly, though not altogether free from risk. Meiklejohn and the admiral might have suspicion, at any

rate they would be annoyed that I had fallen ill at this inopportune moment. Whether the whisky or the hope of escape had given me new heart I cannot say; I do know that I fell asleep with a settled resolve to let the admiral or his factor do the dirty errand which I had shirked. At the dreaded hour beyond midnight I woke, but soon went to sleep

again. It was the best night I had had for weeks.

In the morning I assured Mrs. Paterson I was feeling better, and this was true. She advised me to keep my bed for a day. This was the suggestion I had been waiting for; again I feigned reluctance, again I let myself be overruled. My landlady promised to send the office-keys and a message by the boy who brought our milk. Meiklejohn came along soon after ten; he appeared to have no suspicion, and he showed himself seriously concerned about my illness. Indeed, before he got the length of my room, Mrs. Paterson had given him an alarming account of my symptoms, so that I needed to do nothing but look the invalid.

"You wouldn't get down to Ralston's, of course?" he

asked, as he sat at my bedside.

I said No; I had not felt well all day, and the feeling had

got so bad when I came home that I went to bed at once.

"You'll find the note of sale in the breast-pocket of my jacket there," I told him, "if you want to do anything with it."

He did not take it, and he could not help saying that it

was unfortunate I had broken down just then.

"Though we can't help illness," he added, "and you must give yourself a chance, James, now that you are in bed. Don't rise till you're feeling all right. I'll 'phone for Finlay to come up to-day and see you."

"Better wait and see how I go on to-day," I said. "If I'm no better I'll send along to the office before closing-time.

and you can 'phone then."

"You should have taken a rest before now," my friend said, and indeed he had recommended a holiday more than once. "I'm inclined to think, though, that's it a touch of influenza. Mrs. Paterson tells me you were sick and shivering—common signs. However, I'll tell the admiral you're feeling better. He may be waiting for me at the office already."

I was not sorry influenza had been mentioned. The admiral dreaded the complaint, for he had suffered badly

from it in two visitations. It was not likely he would come near me.

Mrs. Meiklejohn called in the afternoon with some dainties and took a message for her husband that I felt myself easier

and should not need the doctor that night.

The evening wore in without more visitors. About eight o'clock I heard Mrs. Paterson speaking to someone at the door, and in a little she came into my room and told me that a gentleman was asking for me. I inquired who it was.

'It's," called out a harsh voice, "Gillespie from Sawers's office. But don't let me bother you if you are not up to the

mark."

I told him to come in. Gillespie was our agents' manager. He was a dark, stout fellow, with a good deal of energy and much assurance.

After he had condoled with me on my illness and explained that he had just called in passing to inquire for me, he went on,

"Mr. Meiklejohn 'phoned in for me this afternoon, and I've just been up at the house getting my instructions from him and the admiral. They want me to make a bargain with Ralston about his place. You were to try it if you had been well enough. It seems he's rather a touchy customer, but I suppose he'll be civil enough?" he added, with a note of inquiry in his coarse voice.

"Certainly; you'll find him quite civil," I assured him.
"You see, I've never had any dealings with him except by letter. If there was any tip you could give me, I might find it useful."

I told him I could think of nothing to help him, and that any hints would be needless; he would know far better than

I how to manage such an affair.

"Oh, well, I daresay I've handled worse customers," he said, with a self-satisfied air, and after wishing me a speedy recovery he took his leave, explaining that he must see to the business ere it grew late. He did not ask for the paper, and

I concluded he had been furnished with a copy.

It was a great comfort to be quit of the loathsome task. To be quite candid, I must confess to being touched in my vanity at finding that my place had been filled so soon. Still, the feeling of relief was the dominant one, and the best proof of this I can give is that I was soon asleep and slept the whole night through.

How Gillespie sped in his mission I was soon informed; the fullest account was given me by Mr. Ralston himself in his own house.

"When Gillespie called," he told me, "I was in the parlour with the wife and bairns, and I took him in there, as it was

the only room where we had a fire.

"'Don't bother to go out, Mrs. Ralston,' he said. 'I shan't be a minute.' And after a little talk he explained that he had called about the sale of our place. The admiral was still prepared to give four thousand for it. I told him his people had been informed that I wouldn't say another word about the sale unless my figure was forthcoming.

"' That was?' he asked.

"'floo an acre.'

"'But that'll run to something like £6,000."

"' Fully that,' I said.

"'Now, look here, Mr. Ralston, you know as well as I do that that's out of the question. Of course, your place lies in to Lowis, and so the admiral is offering more than it would fetch in the market; but you know yourself that £6,000 or anything like it is ridiculous."

"'Then say no more about it,' I told him. 'I'm not

inviting offers for the place.'

"'No. But here's what we'll do, Mr. Ralston. Although £4,000 is a high figure, yet in the circumstances I'll take the risk of making it guineas. Now, I'm going beyond my commission, but you're sure of the money though the odd two hundred should come out of my own pocket. There you are now.'

"' £100 an acre.'

"' £4,200,' he repeated, as if he hadn't heard me. 'And that's a price that was never offered for land in this district.'

"I just shook my head to let him know it was useless. Then he begins gabbling about the admiral being flooded with offers of property if he were known to be giving such a figure. However, I stopped him.

However, I stopped him.

"'Look here,' I said. 'I've a habit of meaning a thing when I say it. I've told you what I want for the place; you can't give me that; so I'll not listen to another word you say

on the subject.'

"He didn't speak for a little. Then he said, with a sort of smile as if my terms were too absurd for anything, 'So that's your last word?'

"'fnat's my last word."
"floo an acre?"
"I nodded.

"'Then we'll give it you; 'and he whips a paper from his pocket. 'We'll better sign it and be done with it; 'and out

comes his fountain-pen.

"I was so flabbergasted that I couldn't say a word. The fellow has the paper laid on the table, the pen stuck in my hand and I felt as if I were dreaming. Though I did glance over the paper and could make out the words plainly enough, I really wasn't taking in the sense, and I signed my name hardly knowing what I was doing. Even after I had seen the fellow away and had come back to the parlour, Harriet and I stared at one another and could scarcely speak. You may know it was pretty bad when her ladyship lost the use of her tongue," ended Mr. Ralston, smiling at his wife.

"It was only after I came to myself," he added, "that I understood why he had wanted her to remain in the room. The infernal rascal had been afraid that, when I got the sum I asked, I might draw back and ask more still. That's what he would have done, no doubt. And he would think I could

hardly back out before my wife."

Long ere Mr. Ralston gave me the full story I had heard of the bargain being struck. Meiklejohn called with the news the day after. Wonderful how soon the influenza left me!

I was at work the next morning.

## CHAPTER XXIX

OW impossible for women to understand men! As impossible, I suppose, as for men to understand them. Nina could not see that my concern about social wrongs was as deep as my life. She would lose patience and declare that I had let myself be carried away by a lot of rubbish in books; or, again, that I had taken up those ridiculous notions because I wanted to be different from any other body. She handled me very injudiciously, poor thing! I may say that now. She watched for every remark that betrayed my peculiar opinions, and met it with feminine logic, as if determined to keep me from moving an inch on the way I was heading. Or she would try to lead me captive, would plan for the future, tell me how she would like our drawing-room furnished, and so on. I felt then like a led puppy. At times she would seem to forget everything but her love for me, would ask in tender reproach, "Do you love me as much as ever, Jim? As much as when I sang at Parkend?" And when I tried to reassure her, she would say, "Ah! I don't think you do." That was trying, for it touched my pity; still, it repelled me. With it all, I was strongly attached to her; we had courted so long that we had become a habit to each other. Though I was often uncomfortable when with her, I was restless and lonely away from her, and if she gave a sign of flirting with a rival my jealousy was up at once and took long to be laid. When we were alone together, I kept very much to local gossip; that was safe, and was more comfortable than other talk. But it must have been cold and unsatisfying to poor Nina.

In May I was in London, going on from Wiston. Admiral Seton lived now in great state; why, it was not easy to understand. My own belief was that Mrs. Matthias-James, who stayed with her father when in town and had often to do the

honours of the house owing to her mother's delicate health was the instigator Her plea might be that Reggie's interest called for such show. The night of my arrival there was a reception to which I had been invited. The Setons would think it a treat for me to attend such a function, and at one time it might have been. Now I saw too clearly how this prodigal luxury was maintained, and I slipped away as soon as I decently could. My host and his family were too much occupied with more distinguished guests to miss me. The next day I had to appear at Wilton Crescent and report on estate business to Admiral Seton and Miss Maymie. The admiral had some other engagement, however, and my interview with him had to wait till next day. The marchioness was present, and at lunch she remarked that I had left early the night before.

I gave as excuse that I had not felt altogether well. Indeed,

the plea was not false.

After lunch the marchioness, who kept a keen eye on her property, had to hear all that I thought important. When

business was exhausted, she said,

"You were certainly not looking well last night, James, and papa tells me that Mr. Meiklejohn has been speaking to him about that. You ought to take a good long holiday. Papa and I are both anxious that you should, and we must just try to do without you for a time," she added, smiling.

I thanked her, but said I had no wish to be away for long:

I didn't feel the need of change.

"There's nothing worrying you, is there, James?" the marchioness inquired. "That's often worse than ill-health; indeed, it soon brings on ill-health."

"Well-" I began.

"I thought so," she interrupted. "I could read in your face that you were in trouble. If you care to tell me, James, it might be a relief to you, and certainly if you can show me how I can help you it will be a great pleasure to me."

I thanked her again, and was hesitating as to the best way to begin my story, for I felt drawn to give her my confidence,

when she said,

"You and Miss Fleming are still good friends, I hope?"
And when I involuntarily contracted my brows and did not
at once reply she went on, "Have I guessed right again,

James? I do trust nothing is wrong; but if a friend can do

anything, you may depend on me."

"It's not altogether easy to explain what's wrong, Lady Soar," I said at last. "The truth is, there's nothing directly wrong between us. Here is what is causing the trouble: I'm not altogether comfortable in my position, not altogether satisfied with my—my work, and—and—"

"I thought, James, that you and Mr. Meiklejohn got on admirably together. I know he thinks most highly of you."

"It's not that. In fact, if I didn't get on with Mr. Meiklejohn, it would be all my own fault. It's——"

"Perhaps your salary is not sufficient? indeed, I'm sure

it can't be for all you have to do."

"It's quite sufficient, Lady Soar. At any rate, it quite satisfies me. The trouble is about another thing altogether. I've—I've come to hold certain opinions about property, land, and so on, and they don't square with my duties as a factor."

"Ah! you're inclined to Radicalism or Socialism or something of that sort, and don't feel comfortable in upholding the land system?"

"That's just it," I said, greatly surprised both at her quick comprehension and at the words she had chosen to convey

her meaning.

"And Miss Fleming disapproves of those opinions? Naturally," she went on. "It means the upsetting of all your plans. You'll have nothing to look forward to, no home, no career."

"I believe your ladyship has exactly told her feeling."

"Certainly that is it; it must be. Do you know why I understand the situation so well, James?" and she gave a curious smile. "The reason is," and she paused a little as if she had hardly decided to tell me all, "that the marquis inclined to those views and grew very dissatisfied with his position." My face must have been expressive, for she continued, "Yes, James; and in spite of my influence he might have taken some unusual course." I still said nothing, and she went on, with a pause at each sentence, "My position for a while was very difficult. Our case, though, was different from yours in this way: I did not know before our marriage that he held these opinions. It's a serious thing, James, when a man gets those notions into his head, a serious thing

for the people connected with him. It means difficulties in his home life, for a wife can't be expected to let him give effect to his ideas, unless indeed she is peculiar herself."

"Well, Lady Soar," I said, "there certainly is this difference: I have spoken plainly enough to-to the lady."

"That does make a difference, James. And perhaps she will be prepared to risk marriage, knowing your opinions, and altogether. Well, I'm not called on to give advice."

"I should like to have your ladyship's advice."
"It seems to me," she said, smiling, "that it's the lady I should most need to advise. And she isn't here, and probably wouldn't take my advice even if she were."

"That means," I said with a laugh, "that your advice

would be unfavourable-I mean, to me."

"We need say nothing about that, James, seeing that Miss Fleming isn't here to be advised. But to yourself, James, I want to say this. If you feel that your opinions would allow you to marry and settle down, I'll see that you're put in circumstances to do so at once. No, James," she went on, when I said her kindness was excessive, "I consider that you aren't half paid for your services to me at least, and it may be the same with papa; I can't tell. So have no anxiety about money matters; you may marry to-morrow so far as they are concerned."

I thanked her again, but acknowledged I was too doubtful

of myself to think of settling down.

"That's what I feared, James," she said. "However, I hope you'll feel yourself free ere long to come to me and

ask me to fulfil my promise."

When I parted from the marchioness that afternoon I was in a more cheerful mood than I had known for long, so greatly had I been touched and comforted by her kindness. By the time I entered the quiet of the park, another matter she had spoken of was engaging my thoughts. The revelation about her husband had made some dark places clear. It did not comfort me, however; far from that. This young nobleman, so different from me in everything else, had yet been wandering in the same maze. His only escape had been -what? Was mine-? I durst not let the thought come to birth, but the gleam of the Serpentine made me shiver.

I have said that my mental torture was assuaged by the open air. This was my experience in the country only, not in towns. In the town my distress was aggravated. I came to dread visits to Craigkenneth, at least to the poorer parts. If the Meiklejohns had visitors, I had sometimes to accompany them and show them the sights. On one of these excursions, as we were passing down the Wynds after exploring the castle, the spectacle of the squalid dwellings and the miserable inhabitants grew terrifying. The very recollection was so dreadful that when, some weeks later, I had to meet Nina and another Aletown girl and take them up to the castle, I contrived excuses for leading them by the Back Walk and the

cemetery so as to avoid the Wynds.

On this visit to London I had such another distressing experience. It was a sunny afternoon, the last day of my stay, and I had been hanging about the canal in St. James's Park watching the water-fowl. As I strolled westward I gradually became aware of black objects scattered all over the grass to the right. It was some time ere I realised what they were. On the great expanse of sun-warmed sward were hundreds of men, women, and children squatted or sprawling, all of them in rags, many searching their rags for vermin. Something like a panic seized me. I hurried off as if I were hunted, and on reaching the broad walk in Green Park near Constitution Hill I sank on a bench exhausted. As I sat, rallying my strength and composure, a man, one of those awful objects, trailed himself along to the fountain. His hair was reddish, his freckled face was burned brick-colour with the sun. He gulped a cupful of the water, another, a third; it seemed his thirst would never be slaked. I watched him, fascinated. As he took the cup from his mouth the third time he looked at me. Perhaps he thought I was watching him with amused contempt, or, more like, it was all my own fancy; anyhow, his eyes seemed to scowl so fiercely that my own fell and I did not raise them till he was gone. Then I got up and slunk

I mentioned, some chapters back, that ere I was long in the factor's office I lost all interest in working-people, or, if I was forced to take an interest in our own employees, I looked on them as beasts of burden that I had to watch and drive. A new feeling possessed me now: I was ashamed before them. I tried to keep out of the way of the ploughmen and labourers. If I did meet them and had to speak in passing, I kept my eyes away. There was a lad on the estate,

a humble, hard-working 'prentice-gardener, who had a habit of touching his cap to me. Rather than risk that salute I have many a time avoided the gardens when I would fain have spent an hour there after leaving the office. This feeling of shame before work-people was with me even in towns and among strangers. When I passed labourers laying the causeway in Craigkenneth, carrying hods of bricks up the gangways of new buildings, loading carts, and so on, I turned my head aside. I felt that they despised and hated me as one of the

crew they had to carry on their back.

Nowadays, if an earnest soul cannot reach the truth on social questions, it is not for want of would-be guides. In every other bookshop you see pamphlets, at every other street-corner you hear orators, urging the people to make for Socialism. Old Atkinson's rough warnings kept me from being lost in that swamp. They had taught me, what was confirmed by all I saw and heard later, that your Socialist agitator is knave or fool or a mixture of both. He cries "The Land for the People!" "The Tools and Workshops and all the rest for the People!" I also was far enough on by this time to want the land and everything else for the people; but I saw that he did not really want these for the people: he wanted them for himself and his kind. These wise and clever spouters were to hold the land and all the means of wealth, and would say to the people: "You're to do so-and-so," "You're to get such-and-such." They were to do the administering, the people were to do the working. In a word, there was to be merely a change of master; for the private landlord and capitalist we should have the Socialist organiser. That the new master would be better I did not believe; that he might be worse I could see very well.

More than once I was on the eve of writing old Atkinson, or even calling on him in some of my journeys south, and telling him my perplexities. There had been no correspondence between us since I returned the Carlyle letters. The reason I did not consult him was that I had seen he was not at peace himself. He knew we were off the road and had none but blind guides; the true way he did not know, or else untoward circumstances kept him from taking it. Was there no true way, I was often forced to ask? Is it inevitable that man shall live in strife and misery and die without ever knowing peace? That was a terrible doubt, the most terrible of all;

it was that doubt that was bringing me to suicide or the madhouse.

My night-wanderings, begun in the winter storms, were more frequent now, for I could not take liquor to make me sleep; it heated me too much. I roamed the woods and fields, lane and highway, hoping to wear myself done. On one such night-it was early in June, not long after my return from that London visit-far on in the night,-it must have been past midnight—I found myself at the Borestone. Visitors to the battlefield may remember that close to the stone where the old standard flew there are some steps let into the grassy bank. On one of these I sat down, for my limbs were tired, though my thoughts were active as ever. The rest calmed me somewhat; indeed, the night was so wonderful that the mind, however obsessed, could not escape its influence. The fullmoon flooded the landscape till the distant hills and woods were not only visible but clear, while things at hand, hedge, tree, dusty road, were so bright as to give the illusion of day. I had the scene to myself, for the lovers who frequent the seats at the flag-staff were all away; yet I was not without congenial company. A crake was rasping just over the hedge in front; from somewhere beyond the little bowling-green came the hurried chatter and mocking of a sedge-warbler which another, like a faint echo, was answering from about the mill-lade. As I sat listening to the noisy songster near me, the thought—the thought I had been seeking so long, swam into my soul. There had been no hint of its coming; yet there it was, living, clear, perfect. I rose and wildly took a stride or two along the dusty road. Then I sat down on the bank of sward to assure myself of my treasure, and it was only the need of exertion to relieve my joy that forced me to move. The walk home was an exalted dream; yet with the rapture was such peace that I slept ere my head was well on the pillow.

## CHAPTER XXX

THEN I woke, bright sunlight was streaming into my room and, as it seemed, into my soul. Some great good-fortune had fallen to me; soon I recollected what. It wanted half an hour of risingtime, and that half-hour was one of the most joyous I have ever known. I was hugging my late-found treasure, making sure of it, asking how it had become mine. I saw-or maybe I am confusing that morning's reverie with later reflectionsthat various influences had been drawing me on to success. When the earliest doubts had risen as to the rightness of my position and duties, I had tried to lay them by all sorts of devices. I had drunk and smoked, for instance. Latterly, I had scarcely touched either whisky or tobacco. And though I had abstained from other than moral considerations—the whisky heated me too much in the summer weather and smoking increased my nervousness-I got the benefit of the abstinence: my brain was clearer, less clouded. Another reason, stronger still, was this: I had been dealing more truthfully with myself. When first challenged by my own conscience, I justified my position. A factor did harm by upholding land-monopoly; on the other hand, he did good by encouraging agriculture, maintaining order on an estate, and so on. Besides, I did my work faithfully, was neither negligent nor venal. At one time, indeed, I was near endorsing old Mitchell's pronouncement that a good factor was a boon to the community. I had long got past that and, though I retained my position and knew of no better, I acknowledged to myself that the position was wrong. This was a great advance. Let a man stop lying to his own conscience, and there is hope he may find the truth and have strength to follow it; if he tries to justify what he knows to be false and wrong, he puts out his own eyes.

There was another thing, the most important, perhaps. Of late I had been more patient and kindly. The feeling of human kinship had grown strong. Instead of looking down on the work-people of the estate, I felt humiliated before them, and when I had to deal with them I treated them as human beings. I can see clearly now that this helped me to my great discovery. The moral and the intellectual cannot be parted. Naturally; for the soul, or whatever you like to call your spiritual nature, is one and indivisible; strengthen it or weaken it at one point, and you make it stronger or weaker throughout. Hence I have tried to take this as a rule of life: when in any perplexity, don't rush and strain to find the right course; live better, be purer, kindlier, and your troubled

thoughts will clear and you will see the way through.

How simple the truth was—now that I had found it! How near! And I had been searching for it the world over! The answer that would lay every doubt had been before me from the first. Why had I missed it? For this reason: the question had been wrongly put. I had been asking, How can I put an end to wrong and suffering? I ought to have asked, How can I cease doing wrong and causing suffering myself? In a word, I had asked, How can I put the world right? I should have asked, How can I put myself right? The moment that truth rose before me as I sat on the Borestone steps, all was clear. I soon saw, of course, that, though I had asked the wrong question so long, there was an excuse for the mistake. All the reformers that I had heard or read had made the same error, and their example had misled me. Old Atkinson was the only one who had seemed to know whereabout the secret lay, and now that I could recognise the value of his hints, the respect I had always entertained for the old Cumbrian was greatly increased. Yes, he had a better head than the lot of them; and this might help him too, that, unlike the spouters whom he mercilessly exposed, he had spent his days in useful manual toil, and so had kept close to Nature and truth!

That was another of my rapturous days. The world seemed fresh and new, my heart danced, I felt as if I could speak in poetry. Such exaltation had been mine ere now, when days were sunny, when my prospects were fair, when I was dreaming about Nina. The difference was that those old moods were transitory, known for transitory even at the time;

now I felt that my gladness would never quite die, for it drew its life from reason. If the world was not new, my eyes

were, and that was the same.

The one who had the right to know my decision first was Nina. She was to be in Craigkenneth on the market-day, visiting cousins, but I could not wait till then. That very evening I cycled by the familiar carse road to Aletown Ferry. It was an evening of unclouded sunshine; fields, river, hills were steeped in radiance. The old ferryman seemed to have drawn fresh life from the midsummer warmth; his limbs had little trace of stiffness, his talk inclined to optimism. He discoursed of the hay-crop which was just ready for cutting; it was very heavy on the carse, and he understood it was looking as well on the dry field. Yes, it promised to be a

prosperous year for the agricultural community.

"A boon to the community," was on my tongue, and in the desperate effort to keep it back I had to laugh outright. Indeed, my whole mood was one of merriment; my heart was dancing, and words and look had to keep time. Old Mitchell might conclude I had been promised a rise of salary or was on the top of my wedding. But my mood sobered somewhat as I entered Aletown, and for the first time I hoped my sweetheart might be from home. Then I could acquaint her by letter. Poor Nina was at home, and, perhaps from not expecting me, was even tenderer than usual. Some young people were with her playing tennis, so we had little time to be alone together, and I did not seek the chance. Her friends waited late and gave me a reasonable excuse for keeping silence that night. Nina was up to breakfast with me next morning, and proposed to convoy me on her cycle part of the way. As we went flying along the country road in the sunny morning, she was particularly talkative and merry, and how to divulge the tidings that would dash her joy I could not see. I tried to make openings and failed. At last -we were just past Melva distillery, I remember-I gulped out,

"Do you know, Nina, I am thinking of giving up my

place?'

She turned to me with eyes I could not meet. It was some seconds before she spoke.

"What do you mean, Jim?" she asked at last,

"Well, I feel very uncomfortable in an estate office. As I've told you often, I have to do things and see things done

that I don't like. And then," I went on, feeling the advantage of being able to make my confession from the saddle of a hard-spinning bicycle, "I have thought a great deal, as you know, Nina, about the relations of rich and poor and I see that these relations are not right, are altogether wrong, indeed, and that I am helping to keep up the wrong by serving the rich as I am doing."

She did not speak, and we rode on in silence till I felt uncomfortable. I was about to speak, merely for the sake of saying something, when Nina stepped off her bicycle, and, though I recognised that my advantage was going, I had to dismount. We walked on side by side, and still Nina did not utter a word. Her face was very sulky and she kept her

eyes away. To break the awkward silence I said,

"I feel I must give my work up and-and look out for something else, something that will let me live in kindness with working-people, instead of driving them on for the benefit of the rich.

"Yes," she said almost fiercely; "that's just your selfish

ness."

"Selfishness, Nina!"

"Yes, selfishness;" and she stood and faced me. "You think of nobody but yourself. Because you've taken some ridiculous notions into your head, you're going to follow them out and give up everything, and you never give a thought to other people that you have led to look forward to something very different."

"Indeed I do, Nina. I have thought of you a great deal."

"Oh! And what do you propose to do?"

"I-I don't know very well what I may do yet. It was only last night, indeed this morning, that I saw clearly it was my duty to give up my post, and I have spoken to nobody but yourself. What I may turn my hand to I can't say. It will be some kind of common work, labourer's work."

"And I am to be cast aside like an old rag?"

"Nothing of the kind, Nina. If you can be content to share the life I mean to lead, it will be all the better for me." She sniffed disdainfully. "You don't know yourself what

life you're going to lead. You said so a minute ago."

"In a way—" I began, when a hooting motor came rushing on and made us draw to the footpath. We stood our cycles against the roadside dyke, and I went on.

"In a way I do. I shall be a country labourer, or something of that kind."

"Oh yes. And had you any talk of this when you led me

to-to care for you?"

" No; but-"

"No; you led me to care for you, and you were going to make a position for yourself and me, and now, when it suits you, all this is thrown to the winds, and I am told I may be with you when you don't know yourself how you're to be living."

Her tone was not so hard as she spoke the last words, and looking at her I saw that tears were coming. Ere I had found

words she went on,

"That's just men all through; thinking of nobody but themselves, expecting other people to care for them, and,

whenever they take a whim, casting them aside."

Some tears were making their way down her fresh round cheeks, and she was too proud to call attention to them by wiping them away. By some peculiarity of my nature I cannot bear to see anyone, even a child, crying. It will be understood, then, that I did not feel comfortable when I saw my sweetheart's tears and knew that I had made them flow.

"I didn't mean to pain you, Nina," I said.

"Oh! you thought I shouldn't care?" she retorted.

"How was I not to care, I should like to know?"

She was about to say more, but must have felt that all her strength was needed to save an utter breakdown. I did not venture to speak, for fear of hurting her anew, so the two of us stood again in an awkward silence. At last, without really thinking what I did, I took out my watch. Nina may have thought I was impatient to be off, for she turned her bicycle and made to mount.

"Are you leaving me this way, Nina?" I asked reproach-

fully.

"I don't know that there's anything more to say," she

answered in a cold and somewhat weary tone.

"I'll see you on Thursday, at any rate?" I asked; and when she made no reply, I added with some earnestness, "Look here, Nina; I'll say and do nothing in this affair till we meet on Thursday and have another talk. You'll promise to be in, dear, as you arranged?"

"I can't say. What's the good of anything now?" she

said in the same passionless voice.

"I'll be down at the train, at any rate, and I'll do nothing till after that," I repeated; but without a word of reply or farewell she got on to her saddle and started.

I stood watching her upright figure till the machine glided round a crook of the road and the distillery buildings interposed their high bare walls. She had not once glanced back.

On reaching Craigkenneth I made a call on Laing, the builder, though I knew it would throw me late for the office. Ever since my last encounter with Liddell I had been uncomfortable about the man, and had charged myself with aiding in his fall. If I was to do anything for him, I must do it without delay. Once I resigned my place at Lowis, I should lose the little influence I possessed. Certainly, another day would have done well enough; but the truth is, my spirits had drooped owing to Nina's coldness, and I hoped that in doing a kindness to another I might regain my cheerfulness, or at least forget myself. Laing was in his office and glad, as usual, to see me. I spoke of Liddell, and asked if he could take him on. Yes; he would be quite pleased; his carters were often shifting, and Liddell should have the first chance. I wondered, with a certain feeling of amusement, whether Laing would be as keen to oblige me did he know my situation. Not to mislead him about Liddell, I told him the man was drinking.

"Though I honestly believe," I added, "that he isn't a drunkard. He has been unlucky, and seems to be one of those people that can't stand bad luck. If things mended with him, he might be as steady as he was when I knew

him first."

Laing made light of the failing. Since I took an interest in the man, he would keep an eye on him and see that he got a chance. I could not give Liddell's address, but I promised

to hunt him out and send him along to the office.

Would Nina visit Craigkenneth on the market-day? Or would she find some pretext for keeping her mother at home, or at least remaining at home herself? The question occurred to me often in the interval, and I inclined to the notion that she would not appear. I was on the platform at the set hour, and it was with some surprise I saw my tall sweetheart stepping from a carriage. Her manner was quiet, though frank

enough, and we met as ordinary friends. She gave me a second surprise when she proposed that we should accompany her mother to her sister's house in the Glebe, and then should take a turn somewhere by ourselves. When we had seen her mother to the door, we sauntered across to the Back Walk, where the elms shaded us pleasantly from the strong midsummer sun. Nina had brought me a magazine from her father with some hitherto unpublished letters of Carlyle, and this gave me a chance of talking without touching on the subject that must have been nearest her heart as well as my own. Indeed, I am very backward at tackling any delicate question, and we might have kept away from this one long enough had not Nina's spirit been better than mine.

"I suppose, Jim," she said without any preface, "we had better talk about what you were speaking of that morning." When I made no rejoinder she went on, "What are you think-

ing about it now?"

I'm still of the same opinion," I answered, and my tone, I fear, was rather aggressive, for I was working myself up for the contest that I thought inevitable.

"Do you mean that you intend to give up your work at

Lowis?

"I do," I answered in the same tone.

"And what do you think of doing afterwards?"

" Just what I said. I shall try to find country work of some kind." After a pause I added, "If you will join me, Nina, it will be all the better."

"We shan't talk about me;" and she gave a slight smile. "But about yourself, Jim; do you think you will be able to

make a living?"

"I can try, at any rate. I've been out of the way of working for years, but I must just try to get into it again."
"Well, Jim, if you have quite made up your mind, we

needn't say anything more."

We sauntered on for a little, neither of us speaking. I was not prepared for this uncomplaining, almost gentle, acquiescence, and it touched me more than the hot resentment or the tearful pleadings I had expected. Not that I had a doubt about the rightness of my decision; only I felt I had communicated it in too curt and harsh a way, and that to one who deserved all the gentleness I could show. It was, I trust, in a softer tone that I asked,

"Are you vexed with me, Nina?"

"No," she answered in a dispassionate voice. "I'm not glad, of course; this is not what I looked forward to. Still, you must please yourself, and it will do no good to make a fuss."

"Nina," I said earnestly, for I was moved by her self forgetfulness, "do you feel that I am treating you unkindly?" She made no answer, and I went on, "That has never been my intention, and indeed, Nina, it would be mean and ungrateful of me to be unkind to you. But this has been a serious thing; it has cost me a hard struggle to get so far; and if I am to live at all, it must be in some way that my conscience approves."
"I'm not blaming you, Jim," she said quietly. "I suppose

your reasons are enough for yourself. I don't feel them so

strongly; but then it's yourself you must satisfy."

"I didn't look for this, Nina, any more than you," I began; and, when I was casting about for words to tell my thought,

Nina said, with more feeling in her tone,

"There was one thing I wanted put right, Jim. You might think from my being angry that morning that it was on my own account—I mean, for fear of losing a chance of getting settled and-"

"Oh, Nina!" I exclaimed, and my sincerity must have

been evident, for she said,

"Well, if you understand, it's all right. I'll manage some-

how, I daresay."

I conveyed her back to the Glebe but excused myself from going in, and she did not seem to expect me. Always before, when we parted, we had set the time and place for the next meeting. Nothing was said about this now. My feeling was that we should be sure to see each other soon, and that a tryst was needless. She may have felt this too. Anyhow, we said nothing, and the memory of this trifling neglect has often made me think how ill we can foresee our lot, and how a little rift widens and widens with time into a great gulf that there is no passing.

Parting with loved ones is not pleasant; even in memory it wakens a soft melancholy. I will not give more of these scenes. A great effort it cost me to tell my decision to Meiklejohn, and my kind old friend heard it with dismay. Two things he said which I must set down. "James, I'm not a man of many words and I don't make a show of my feelings:

but I've been fond of you ever since you came into this office, and I've come to look on you as my own." The other was, "The admiral will never let you go. He means you to fill

my place some day."

I knew the admiral would not let me go without a struggle. He was in the south at the time, and I wrote him as soon as I had spoken to Meiklejohn. I did not say much, for I knew he would summon me to London and make me give my story by word of mouth. All I told him now was that I had been thinking a great deal on social questions, and that the convictions I had come to would not allow me to remain at my present work. The letter would reach the admiral on the Monday. That afternoon he wired Meiklejohn that he would be at Lowis on the Tuesday evening. I knew our meeting would be painful for both. From the first Admiral Seton and all his household had been good friends to me, and I seemed to be giving them a poor return. If I was to be truthful and open, I should have to say things the admiral would not like to hear. I tried to prepare for the interview by seeking for phrases that would convey my meaning in the gentlest way, but the words were not easy to find, and I had at last to trust to the moment for help. On the Wednesday morning, as I was at breakfast, Mrs. Paterson brought in a letter addressed to me in the admiral's hand.

"Rebecca"—this was a maid at the house—"came along with it," my landlady explained. "She tells me the admiral's

off again."

"Off where?" I asked, not comprehending.

"Back to London. He hasn't made a long stay."
I had said nothing as yet to the old lady about my leaving, and she would have no suspicion that the admiral's visit had to do with me. The hasty departure surprised me utterly; however, the letter would explain. And certainly it did.

"DEAR JAMES,

"I have yours of Saturday intimating your resolve to leave my employment. I need not tell you that it was a great and most painful surprise, for I had not the slightest warning that you were thinking of any such thing. You say that the decision has been come to after long consideration, and, that being the case, it would be useless for me to try to alter it. I must, therefore, though with great regret, accept your resignation. In doing so, I must tender you my sincere thanks for your faithful and valuable services in the past and my equally sincere wishes for your prosperity in the future."

In a postscript he added that Mr. Meiklejohn was empowered to make the necessary final arrangements with me.

The letter, so curt, so formal, was not what I was prepared for; it was, in the admiral's own words, "a great and most painful surprise." Yet, the shock once past, I could read the admiral's thoughts almost as well as if they had been stamped on the note-paper, and when I went across to the office and handed the letter to Meiklejohn, it was with an air that said, "I told you so."

"I can't get to the bottom of this," my friend remarked with a shake of the head. "He sent for me last night and we had a long talk. He knows more about your opinions than you told him in your letter. Somebody must have been

speaking about you. Master Reggie, I suppose."

"It couldn't be he," I said, though I did not inform him it must have been the marchioness. Of course, I was aware that while she might retail some of our conversation to her father she would have no thought of hurting me.

"At any rate," said the factor, "he told me he had plenty of annoyance already with such views. That could only

refer to Master Reggie."

This time I did not correct him, though I could have done so.

"And he didn't want any more?" I suggested with a

laugh.

"Well, that's about it," my friend admitted. "At the same time he might have given you a shake of the hand before

you left. You deserve that, surely."

"It helps to make the parting all the easier," I said. "This letter evidently means that I'm to clear out at once. So I'll only stay till you find I can be done without." He gave a look as if he could say something on that head but hardly liked. The letter had prepared me for being suspicious. "Perhaps he has the place filled already?" I asked.

"Well, the fact is, James," he admitted, "you're not altogether wrong. He has a man in his eye, at any rate. It's a man in Harriman's office—Biggs, the name. You'll likely

know him."

" Ouite well."

Harriman was a land-agent in Hampton whom we often employed on the Wiston-Court property, and I had occasionally met his assistant, a short, stout youth of, perhaps, fiveand-twenty, with a pale, flabby, and slightly pock-pitted face, a hurried business-like way of speaking and a go-ahead manner.
"Oh, well," I remarked, "as I said, it makes it the easier

for me to go. We'll let Mr. Biggs make a start next week."

Only a very superior person would be above a feeling of wounded vanity at being shown so unmistakably that he could be done without. I was sore hurt and, though I tried to keep an unconcerned look and tone, my kind friend must have seen that I was suffering.

The admiral's treatment, however, did this for me; it lessened the sadness, though not the bitterness of parting. My last days in office passed quietly enough. One incident

only I will tell.

The vengeful passion I had long nursed had been for a while as good as dead. In those months of self-torture Big Pate and all my relations to him had lost their interest. Since the night at the Borestone when a new light had risen I did think of him occasionally; and while I could not profess any love for my old tyrant, I felt I should have been able to forego my vengeance had a chance of gratifying it come my way. But what of the plot against the admiral? Meiklejohn had been warned and would watch Big Pate and his neighbour, and at times I was inclined to let him settle with the pair. This did not satisfy me either, and at last-it was that Wednesday when the admiral's letter came—another course, that had been seen by glimpses already, lay before me as straight and clear as a shaft of sunlight. The same evening I strolled over to Todhillock. Kirkwood was in his accustomed place and attitude, leaning over the dyke in front of the steading and eyeing some two score of bullocks that grazed in the park beside the burn.

"Ye're lookin' first-rate, Mr. Bryce," was his greeting. "My son Weelum has been sayin' for a while that he's certain ye're not well; but I can't say I ever saw ye in better fettle;"

and he proceeded to caution me about my health.

Old Kirkwood was a little, stoutish man, grey-bearded, round-shouldered, and he wore spectacles; he was the only farmer on the estate who did. He had the distinction, too.

of being the most religious of our tenants. He and his only son "Weelum" managed a Sunday-school that met in a little hall on the Warnock road. His oily, fleeching manner made people feel comfortable, self-satisfied; it had that effect on me after I knew of his roguery; it was beginning to work even now. I had to make a plunge to save myself.

"You've been getting a lot of artificial these last two seasons,

Mr. Kirkwood?

Pause.

"Ye-es, Mr. Bryce. It'll not do, Mr. Bryce, to starve the land even though we're leavin' it. We get the good while we're here, Mr. Bryce, and some other body 'll get it when we're away. That's what I often tell Weelum, Mr. Bryce."

"True. But you've been getting twice as much as usual

of late;" and I gave him a look with the tail of my eye.

He was in the act of stealing a sidelong glance at me from beneath his spectacles, and the contrast between the shrewd eye and the demure expression of his other features was so comic that for my life I could not master myself. I managed to keep in my laughter, but gave vent to some unearthly grunts as if I had been choking.

"I'm usin' more and more artificial every year, Mr. Bryce. That's the tendency with farmers nowadays. Ye'll not get the best results without it, Mr. Bryce, always provided you've plenty of the natural stuff for a foundation. For it needs

them both, Mr. Bryce. It's all nonsense to say-"

"The Mailing stuff has been coming in your name, Mr. Kirkwood."

Another pause.

"Ye-es. It's handy at times to get a neighbour's carts if your own horse are busy or the like of that. And if I oblige you to-day, Mr. Bryce, you can oblige me to-morrow. It's the only—"

"Yes; but it's all booked to you, Mr. Kirkwood, which means that when your claim for Unexhausted is sent in at the end of your tack, it'll be about double what it ought to be."

"Mr. Bryce," said the old fellow unctuously, almost solemnly, "you don't believe that I would wrong my laird or any man of a penny? It would be ill done of me after gettin' every consideration from the admiral and from yourself, Mr. Bryce, not to speak of Mr. Meiklejohn. I can assure ye, Mr. Bryce—"

"Listen to me, Mr. Kirkwood. Let me have my say out quietly and you'll understand why I am speaking about this. As to the fact, there's no doubt whatever; the bags were all addressed to you; Mackinlay's were lifted from here after dark. Now, why do I interfere, Mr. Kirkwood? Because I'm assistant-factor? Not at all. You'll learn before long that that's not the reason. It's for your own sake, Mr. Kirkwood. You're doing a tricky thing, a dishonest thing, and it'll be better for your own peace of mind to put it straight while you can. I'm not referring to the risk of being found out: I'm referring, as I say, to your own peace of mind. you do the straight thing, charging up against the admiral only what you have put into your own land, you'll be able to look him and everybody else in the face, you'll be able to think of your outgoing with satisfaction. If you do the opposite, you may make some money certainly, that is, if the thing comes off-which I don't think it will, for, as I told you, you've been watched-however, you may make some money, but you'll hardly care to think of the transaction, I should fancy; it'll be a spot you'll try to keep your eye away from. And it isn't as if you actually needed the money; you're comfortable enough, I'm glad to know. Now, Mr. Kirkwood, I'll not say a word more now or at any other time. I've had my say out and I'm done. Good evening;" and turning from the old fellow, who kept his eyes on the ground, I walked briskly away.

That week saw the last of me as steward.

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PART III
The Cottage

 PART III Ine Cottage

## CHAPTER XXXI

WARM dewy rain was filling the air as with steam when I entered the strawberry field. It was the first Tuesday of July. Two weeks had passed since I left Lowis, and in the interval I had been looking for country work, but with no success. The season was backward and farmers had not started the hav. Marketgardens, where I would fain have been employed, were doing nothing. But one gardener suggested, "You should try Sparkwell; they'll be needing hands for the strawberries." I went straight to the station and was soon landed at the oldfashioned village. Sparkwell is the same distance to the west of Craigkenneth as Lowis is to the east, that is, something like three miles. Climbing from the village by a country road, I found myself, after a half-mile walk, among the strawberry fields that make the hillside green for miles. They are in the hands of many different tenants; it was one of the most important that I meant to try first. Near the gate that opened on to his fruit-farm was a wooden shed, apparently used as a fruit-house, for women were entering it after showing their full baskets to a man in a mackintosh whom I knew for the grower. He was a big, heavy man, well up in years, with a face as round and red as the sun on a frosty morning. He was so crippled by rheumatism that he leant heavily on his stick even when standing. As I halted near him he withdrew his attention from the women and looked to me.

"Mr. Cowbrough?" I asked, going closer.

"Yes;" and he seemed to look me through with his keen

grey eyes.

"I was told you might be needing an extra hand seeing it's your busy time. I'd be glad to do anything about the place."

The request must have surprised him, for it was a little ere he spoke.

"Ay, this is our busy time," he said at last. "Have ye

ever worked at fruit before?"

"No. I---"

"Where d'ye come from?" he asked sharply.

"From Lowis, near Lucas."

- "Oh, ay. Were ye not-?"
- "Yes, I was in the factor's office," I said, as he interrupted himself.
  - "Ay, ay. And have ye left yer place?"

" Yes."

"What made ye do that? Ye'd have a good job."

"Good enough in a way," I admitted. "But I got dissatisfied with it." As he was evidently waiting for more information, I went on, "I wanted to be doing something useful, working with my own hands, instead of merely watching others or directing others. Farm work or garden work or work like this is what would suit me better."

He glanced me over from head to foot and was silent for

a little. Then he said.

"I know the factor at Lowis, Mr. Meiklejohn. It was him

ye were with, wasn't it?"

I understood what was in his mind. Pulling out a letter I handed it to him. It was a testimonial from Meiklejohn, eulogising my work and character, and commending me to any one who needed an intelligent, industrious, and trust-

worthy servant.

"Ay," was all the observation Cowbrough had time to make on the document, for he took a hasty step forward to intercept a woman at the fruit-house door. "Hey! let's see that basket. A lot of these berries are far too soft. Ye'll have to be a dashed sight carefuller. Mind that." Then turning to me, he resumed his former tone as he said, "I usually take on an extra man about this time."

"Well," I said rather eagerly, "I'd be glad to have work on a place like this, and you could depend on me not eating

the strawberries."

He gave a peculiar laugh that I only found the meaning of later.

"Oh, we don't heed that much. There's work about this place for a while after the strawberries are done. The beds

have to be weeded; then there's the delving up the alleys. What wage would you be expecting?" he asked in a sharper tone.

Things were progressing and I grew more assured.

"I've no idea. The work would be new to me, though it's work I'd thoroughly enjoy. Maybe the best way would be to wait and see if I was any use."

"Are ye stopping in Sparkwell?" he asked.

"No; I'm staying in Craigkenneth." I had been at a small Temperance Hotel there since leaving Lowis. "But," I added, "I suppose one could easily get lodgings in the village."

"Ye might. Of course, there's a hut over there that our spare man occupied last year," and he indicated a little wooden cabin not far off. "It would need a lot of cleaning, for it's just as he left it. I daresay it would be right enough if——"

"The very thing," I interrupted eagerly. "Nothing would suit me so well. I could do everything for myself, and I'd far rather do that than have anybody attending to me."

"It could be made comfortable enough—for the summer, at any rate. There's an iron bedstead in it, and we would send up bedclothes and a mattress. I suppose a flock mattress would do? I don't know if we've a spare feather-bed."

"It'll do first rate. In fact, a bottle or two of straw would

do; there's nothing healthier."

"We'll send the flock-bed up to-night and some dishes."
I thanked him and asked when I should make a start.

"To-morrow morning. There would be no use to-day.

But ye could give the hut a clean-out."

I walked across to it, my heart dancing at the wonderful luck that had befallen me. Here was I about to engage in fruit-growing, a useful occupation and surely the most delightful in the world; and to begin it under such pleasant conditions, living in this little out-of-the-way cabin, doing my own turn and interfered with by nobody! The hut was certainly a very modest dwelling. It was of wood with a corrugated-iron roof and had formerly been the small pavilion for the football club of the village. There was no furniture except the iron bedstead, a fruit crate which had doubtless served for a chair, and a small stove with a telescope pipe, whose upper end emerged into the open air by a round hole cut near the roof. I got a besom from the fruit-house and

started to sweep out my cabin. It had no glazed windows, only a wicket in the back and front. The back one I opened and found myself looking into a cabbage field I had noticed on coming up the lane. The weather had now faired, the sun had come out, and I glanced up with joy to the white cloud-masses in the rich blue. As I contemplated them, a voice immediately beneath my wicket gave me a start:

"Are you Cowbrough's man?"

Looking down I perceived a young woman in petticoat and man's jacket, with a draw-hoe on her shoulder, standing among the cabbages. My hut was set on a little knoll, so that I was considerably above her level.

"Yes," I said, when I had recovered myself.

"My God!" Then, after a pause, "Are you going to stop there?"

I gave the same answer.

"Christ!" Another pause; then, "You'll be a gaffer over the women?"

"No. I'm just a worker."

"My God!" and she gave her head an ominous shake, though neither the gesture nor the ejaculations had meaning for me at the time.

"Are you one of Cowbrough's workers?" I asked, seeing

she was in no hurry to say more.

"No, by God! But I've a sister with him—Sarah Doyle. D've know her?"

"I don't know anybody yet. I'll likely know her soon,

though, for I'll be starting work to-morrow."

She again gave her head the shake and uttered another of her sacred ejaculations. Then she remarked in quite a matterof-fact tone,

"You're a good-looking bloke."

I laughed, as much at her serious air as at her words.

"Will that be worth an extra shilling a day from Cow-

brough?"

She responded with her usual gesture and exclamation, and assumed an easy attitude as if disposed to bear a part in a leisurely dialogue. But I wanted my hut cleaned, so I excused myself from prolonging the conversation and drew in my head.

When I had my new dwelling somewhat tidy, I went in to Craigkenneth by train and brought out my trunk and travelling-bag. In the village I bought tea, sugar, oatmeal, bread, and other necessaries, also a pot, a pan, a few plates and spoons. When I returned to the hill the workers were gone, and I had the strawberry-field to myself, for Cowbrough's house was down in the village. A sparrow flew out as I opened my cabin door. I kindled the stove with some old rasp-canes and chips of coal that were lying in a shed near by. Then I made tea and partook of my first meal with great satisfaction. Tea over, I strolled out to survey my new

quarters.

On the east side the fruit-farm was bounded by a wood of deciduous trees. A wire netting that ran along the fence was little protection, I could see, against rabbits. They had made runs beneath and could pass quite freely. Rasp-canes had been set in this part of the ground, and it was these, not the strawberry plants, that the rabbits devoured. In places you could hardly have told that a cane had ever been set. The rabbits that had been feeding in the quiet of the evening scuttled back to the wood at my approach; only one, a very young thing, had tried to pass through the mesh of the netting and stuck, and there it was struggling when I came up. relieved it and let it away. In the mild, moist air chimneyswallows twittered, swifts screamed, a bat was flitting noiselessly. Turning from the woodside I sauntered along the upper reaches of the strawberry-field and viewed the broad and varied landscape—the Wester Carse, as the great level expanse above Craigkenneth is called, the Fertha meandering through, the Drummond Hills closing it in and leading the eye to the world-famed northern mountains, on whose peaks grey clouds were resting. A feeling of perfect rapture possessed me; it was as if the fruitful slope I stood on, and even the boundless landscape before me, hill, river, and fertile plain, was, in the best sense, all my own.

The bed-clothes had arrived and the bed had been made while I was out. I soon lay down, tired a little after my wanderings, but utterly content with the day's achievement

and the morrow's promise.

My sleep was sound, though it was once broken by a great pounding on the iron roof of my hut. The night was rather gusty, and I concluded that the elm-boughs overhead would be swaying in the wind. Among my purchases that afternoon was a little alarm-clock, which I had sat for five. It

wakened me promptly, and I soon had the stove kindled; for I had laid some rasp-canes and coal-chips in the worker's shed at night. While my pan was boiling, I washed at a spring of delicious water that bubbled into a glazed trough at my door. Breakfast was of tea, bread and butter, and ere it was over the workers had begun to gather into their shed. Sharp at half-past six old Cowbrough, standing at the fruithouse door, blew a whistle, the workers trooped past him and followed a man to a break of strawberries midway up the hill: The strawberries, I had already noticed, were planted, not as I had been used to them at Lowis, in single rows, but in beds of three rows each, an alley, some two feet and a quarter broad, separating the beds. There seemed to be about a hundred workers; ninety-six, I afterwards found, was the exact figure, women mostly, with a few boys and girls of school age. The only man, besides Cowbrough and myself, was the one who had led the troop up the hill, a tall, well-built, country-like fellow, perhaps fifty years old. Cowbrough, whose weight and stiffness had kept him in the rear, soon joined us and shouted to the women to spread along the foot of the rows. Then he began,

"Brady, and you O'Donnell get in there; hurry up now." The two women indicated fell in at the bottom of the first bed, taking a side apiece. The second bed was left blank to give room to work; then Cowbrough grabbed other two women and shoved them into the next alleys to pull the third bed. So he proceeded from alley to alley. All the while he was roaring to Somers and me to get the women into their places, was roaring to the women to take their places, and with his shouts and gestures he soon made the field a babel; the workers would run here and there, getting in each other's way, knocking each other about; three or four would find themselves crowded in the same alley, then would rush out leaving the alley empty, and would stand helpless for a spell, not knowing where to go or what to do; and all the while Cowbrough kept roaring, "Damn it! have ye no heads? What d'ye mean, Molloy, standing there? Somers! can ye not get them started? I can't wait here till night. ye move yer legs a wee bit faster? Folk would think ye had a fifty-six at yer feet."

At last the old hands were all ranged, and Cowbrough had

to tackle the new-comers.

"What's yer name?" "Have ye ever pulled before?"
"Get in there." "Give her a handful of punnets, Somers."
After such a scene of noise and confusion as I had never witnessed the whole band was set agoing.

"Now, Bryce, take their names. This end, man, this

end."

I started with Brady and O'Donnell and proceeded along the line, asking the name of each worker and ticking it off in the roll-book I had been furnished with. When I reached

the new hands I had to enter their names.

While I was so engaged the workers were busy. Each had been provided with a nest of punnets—square chip boxes, holding a pound of strawberries apiece. She drew two from the nest; into one she gathered the larger fruit, meant for eating—"the tables"; the other was for the smaller berries—the "jams" or "preserves." The "tables" had to be pulled with half an inch of stem adhering, the "jams" were husked clean. When a punnet was filled, the worker laid it behind her on the alley, a boy ran up and carried it to the foot of the row, where he set it on a large wooden board such as is used for holding bread. As soon as a board had received its full load, a boy was helped with it on to his head and took it down to the fruit-house. Of course, it was only after a time that I understood the routine, though I am describing it at this stage. After I had taken the roll, I was set to my main task. The strawberries, I have explained, were planted in beds, not in single rows. Now, to stride over a bed was more than the boys could do. Sometimes in their hurry and excitement they did try the jump and usually landed in the bed, crushing the ripe strawberries to pulp and bringing on themselves a storm of curses. Somers and I were understood to do the striding and jumping. We had to pick up the full punnets wherever we saw them, gather them into one alley and, when they amounted to four, shout to a boy who ran up and carried them down to the board, two in either hand. Besides this, we had to take care that the workers were never stopped for want of punnets. When a woman's stock was wearing out, we shouted "Punnets here!" and a boy would fly to the spot with a supply. To do all this for nearly a hundred pickers would have kept four men fairly busy, so that Somers and I were really working double-tides. As if this was not enough, we were expected to run up the alleys every now and then and see that the pickers were doing their task thoroughly. But what shall I say of old Cowbrough? There was nothing he did not attempt. He hobbled up the alleys, examining the punnets to make sure that the right length of stem was left on the "tables" and that the "jams" were husked perfectly clean; then he scrutinised the beds in case any ripe berries had been missed; in addition, he kept an eye on men and boys and held them to their duties. And his mouth was never shut. "What the devil d'ye mean, Connelly? D'ye not know a jam-berry when ye see it?" and he would grab from her punnet a strawberry that was on the border-line between the two kinds. "Riley! have ye nothing better to do than straighten yer back? We've no time for that here. If ye don't mean to work, away down to the fruit-house and get yer money." "Somers!" in a tone of despair as if there was nothing more to live for, "are ye letting these women do just as they like? Look at this, now! That woman has left as many red berries as she has in her punnet. If this is to go on, I may as well give it up altogether."

But this was mildness compared with his treatment of the new hands. Many of them had never been at such work before and, not having been told how to proceed, they could only copy their neighbours, who were often as ignorant as themselves. Cowbrough came on one girl with a punnet of

big and little strawberries mixed.

'Ye blasted idiot! Have ye come out of the asylum? It would serve ye if I broke my stick across yer back."

Another girl had husked the big strawberries and left the

stems on the small ones.

"Get out o' this!" cried the old fellow, fairly frantic; and on the girl attempting a word of defence, "Out o' this with ye!" he howled, with upraised stick. "Down the road with ye, and never let me see yer face again. Here, you at the end! come here and take this row."

The roaring and rampaging upset the workers, the inexperienced ones, at least. Had the work been briefly explained to them to start with and a quiet oversight taken of it afterwards, they would have managed it with no trouble, for they were as a rule willing enough; indeed, the most of them were in such poverty that they were only too anxious to keep their job A ragged lot, they were, poor creatures! all, or

nearly all, Irish, from the Craigkenneth Wynds; most of them young women of, say, eighteen to twenty-five, though there were some old bodies of at least threescore years and ten, and children of ten and less, for it was the school-vacation,

and they had been sent out to earn a shilling.

For a couple of hours old Cowbrough stormed; then he left us and went down to the fruit-house; but as he still had us in view we drove on at the same pace. The morning advanced. New hands were occasionally sent up to join us. I entered their names and the time they started. Somers and I kept jumping over the beds like athletes in training, shouting "Quin," "Lannagan!" and so on, according as this boy or that was nearest, "Punnets!" when we saw a woman's stock running low. The work was incessant; not a moment, not a thought, to spare. Cowbrough reappeared after short intervals, his voice as fresh as at starting, and for twenty minutes he would roar and rage. As the forenoon wore on, the sun grew very hot and the hillside, fronting the south, got it all. I was soft after years of easy life; the sweat poured off me like rain.

At twelve o'clock Cowbrough blew the whistle. A wave of relief seemed to pass over the field; the workers straightened their backs, rose and trooped down to the side of my hut. There a fire had been kindled outside by one of the women, who had left half an hour before us; a big iron plate rested on stones above the flames and was covered with flasks and cans. The pickers grabbed each her own; the older women went into the shed to have their meal, the girls flung themselves down on the bank. Somers accompanied me into the hut, where my trunk served for seat and the fruit-crate for table.

I was too tired to speak much, though I was interested in my companion. He was a big, strong man, and, as I had seen, could display agility in keeping with his strength. When not at work, however, he was slow in his movements and somewhat heavy, almost sleepy-like, in appearance. His features went well with his fine burly figure: a broad and fairly high brow, pleasant grey eyes, a shapely nose. For age he seemed about fifty, though his dark-brown hair and fairer moustache and beard were but lightly touched with grey.

"Are ye tired?" he asked, as I sat silent.

I nodded to save myself the exertion of speaking.

"What's yer first name?" he inquired, evidently feeling it awkward and cold to address me without giving me my name.

" Jamie."

I knew his already, for I had heard the women call him Kenneth.

How easy to know when anybody takes to us! Very little had been said; but the tones of his voice, the way he looked at me, the little things he did for my comfort—giving me the big share of the trunk, handing me my bowl of tea, and so on—told more plainly than words that he found me a welcome

arrival and was ready to make me his friend.

If we were quiet, the young folks outside were making noise enough. They had soon dispatched their tea and the boys—are boys ever too tired to play?—were busy at football, the ball being a bonnet rolled up in a string. The young women, too, were moving about with dancing steps, and occasionally threw a word in as they passed the hut. At last one girl of about seventeen, who was arm-in-arm with another much older, stopped at the door and said saucily,

"Look here, Kenneth, you giddy old kipper, you promised

me a fit-on."

"So I did, Sarah. This is a lassie that's fa'en in love wi' ve, Jamie."

The girl coloured but faced me hardily, and her smile showed

that she was not ill-pleased to admit the impeachment.

"Glad to hear that somebody is taking pity on me," I said.

"What's the name of my pretty admirer?"

The girl was rather pretty, with a babyish pink-and-white face; but it was her figure that was most noticeable. She was very slim and as tight-drawn in the waist as the most fashionable miss. How she could work at all in such bondage—and I had seen she was one of the best workers on the field—was a mystery.

When I asked her name she made an arch bow.

"Sarah Doyle, if you please. It was-"

"Oh!" I interrupted; "it would be your sister I was speaking to yesterday."

"Right you are. You'll have to tell me your name now."

" Jamie."

"Jamie Bryce," and the girl dwelt on it a little. "That's fine. Well, I'm coming to keep house for you."

"Will the house be big enough?" I asked.

"The bed's big enough," Sarah's companion broke in. She was a young woman of twenty-five or so—an Irish beauty; fairly tall, well-made, with blue-black hair, and bright grey eyes. Her creamy cheeks, with the healthy red showing through, made me think of the red-hearts on the garden walls at Lowis.

Her remark raised a laugh among the girls who had mostly gathered round to hear the talk. I was not surprised, for while their tongues had been clattering at lunch-time every other word was an oath or an obscenity. After my half-

dozen years of respectable life, it sounded strange.

The whistle closed our talk; the half-hour's interval—how short a half-hour!—was ended. We trooped up the brae and resumed our various parts, the women pulling their hardest, Kenneth and I jumping our nimblest, the boys running their fastest, old Cowbrough roaring his loudest. The sultry afternoon wore on. Swallows were weaving in and out among the pickers, flying so close and low as almost to brush their faces; titlarks rose, "peeping" from the green beds; occasionally a nest of young mice was found, the bunch of withered grass showing markedly among the fresh leaves; but to the wild life around us we could give no heed. The pace and the heat began to tell. Annie Docherty, Sarah's chum, fainted. The work did not stop; only Sarah sat by her as she lay on her back, while another girl ran for water. She soon came to herself, and then Sarah accompanied her off the field. Sarah came back in a little, but Annie did not return that day. Later, another young woman turned sick. She left without assistance, and in an hour was at her work again. The next to break down was a boy. It was no wonder; the boys' work was perhaps the hardest of all. Besides clearing off the full punnets that Kenneth and I gathered in to the alleys and fetching supplies of empties, they had to take each his turn at carrying the full boards down to the fruit-house. The biggest board held twenty-six punnets of a pound apiece, and would weigh a good stone itself. One of the boys started bleeding at the nose. This only kept him off work for half an hour till the bleeding stopped. Though I tell these incidents now, they made no impression on me at the time; I was too much concerned with myself. As the afternoon advanced I became utterly exhausted. Only with a painful struggle

could I cross the beds, my throat was so parched that I could not shout, and it cost me an effort even to speak. The thought of old times of agony at the Mailing would flash on me, and I would feel, as I did then, that something might give way at any moment and I might die. Cowbrough would retire to the fruit-house at intervals, then would reappear with legs and lungs rested and the roaring began.

The last time he came among us he was foaming.

"It's a quarter-past four and ye've three hundredweight of berries to make up yet. Damnation! How d'ye think orders can be filled at this rate? Am I going to pay you for nothing? I'll take damned good care it pays me before it pays you. Bryce! Where's your eyes? D'ye not see the punnets there? Misskilly!"—to one of the boys,—"what are ye hanging about there for? Go down the road if ye can't move yer legs. The devil take you, Welsh!" in a howl of rage and despair, as a woman lifted her head, "Can ye find nothing to do but straighten yer back?" and on he stormed without a moment's rest till the sound of a buzzer reached us from Craigkenneth. With one movement all the pullers gave a glance upwards, though they did not stop their work; Cowbrough took out his watch, then blew the whistle. The pickers made for the fruit-house with their half-full punnets, then crossed to the shed for the shawls which most of them brought in case of rain, and soon they were off, the girls linking arms and singing a street-song then in vogue about "Sausages for tea." Kenneth and I had some barrels and crates to shift, and as soon as Cowbrough with his wife and son, who did the fruit-house work, had left, we trailed ourselves to the hut and sank down.

We did not speak, we did not move; all we could do was to hold ourselves together. My bones were as if I had been beaten for an hour with a stick, my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth. How I looked I cannot tell; Kenneth's eyes were wild like a hunted creature's. After sitting with scarcely a word for, say, ten minutes, we drew ourselves up a little and prepared for our work of entering the time in my register. This was properly my task, and it was only Kenneth's kindness that made him help me till I grew familiar with the names.

"Brady, ten hours. That right?" I asked.

"Yes, Jamie."

<sup>&</sup>quot;O'Donnell, ten hours. Doyle, ten hours. Docherty, ten-"

"No, Jamie," interrupted my friend. "Docherty left before her time. That was the lassie that turned badly."

"You're right. Annie. Let's see. She would go off about three o'clock. We'll say three. So she'll only have eight hours."

"Ay, Jamie. And it'll keep ye in mind, maybe, if ye just put it doon in yer book at the time when onybody leaves."

"So I will after this. O'Brien ten hours." And so we went through the list. It was long and confusing, for some of the workers had the same surname, and they had to be distinguished not by their first name but by numbers. There were four Dochertys, for instance, whom we had to enter in the roll-book, and even address on the field as Docherty I, Docherty 2, and so on. The work had to be carefully done, too. Cowbrough had a hawk-eye for faults, and the women would know their own time and, if I made a mistake, would let me hear about it on pay-day. It took over half an hour to get through.

"I'll see about tea now," I remarked, though I was still

too exhausted to care for food.

"Ye'd have been better, Jamie, to kindle the stove first; it would ha' been ready by noo."

"But that would have kept you waiting."

"It wouldna ha' been long, Jamie."

He brought in some old rasp-canes and soon had a fire. He would not share my meal, however; his mother would

have his supper ready, he said.

As I sat alone at tea I was not brooding over the worker's hardships or thinking of my surroundings or recalling the friends and the sweetheart I had left. Nothing of all this was in my thoughts. I was merely asking myself with fearful anxiety, Could I survive this toil? Had the first day not wrought some serious, some mortal, mischief? My body was on fire, my throat and mouth powerless, and when I tried to clear them the thick saliva was always tinged with blood. It was well for me that I was too exhausted to think long even about this. I was soon in bed and I must have slept at once. I had got through my first day as a labourer. It was not quite what I had looked for.

## CHAPTER XXXII

HE little alarm-clock wakened me at five the next morning. My bones still ached, my throat was as dry as ever, and when I tried my voice to know whether I could speak, the sound was strange. The day was a repetition of the first, except that old Cowbrough was hardly so much among us. He had a gun, and he often left us and peppered the birds, which were very greedy on the strawberries. At the dinner-hour the woman Macdermott who attended to the hot-plate looked in at the hut.

"My God!" she remarked, "I wouldn't stop here for a

thousand pounds. Would you, Kinneth?"
"Why not?" I inquired.

"Whoy, there's so miny blackguards about, they'll have ye moordered before ye know where ye are. Tom Mailer "this was the man who had occupied the hut the summer before -" used to keep Cowbrough's gun besoide him, and he did this and this," and she made a rapid wheel as if pouring volleys into an invisible host that had beset the hut on all sides.

I sniffed.

"What would folk do here? They know well enough there's nothing to steal."

"My God! you'll see."

Ere Cowbrough left that evening he called to me, "Bryce! can ye use the gun?"

"Yes."

"I've left it in the hut with a lot of cartridges. Blaze away at every blackie and mavis ye see, or we'll soon not have a berry left."

Sure enough my castle was assailed that night. Half an hour past midnight I was awakened by a loud whining outside. When I opened the door, which was only secured by a string

inside to keep it from being blown open by the wind, something white entered. It was Cowbrough's sable-and-white collie that usually spent the day about the fruit-house. He curled himself at once on the floor. His company was welcome, all the more that he apparently took the welcome for granted.

After the third day, though my bones were still tired and sore, I had a feeling that with fair luck I might survive. The hope heartened me, and no doubt would help its own fulfilment. That evening both the collie and the fox-terrier remained at the field instead of accompanying their master home. Their motive I cannot tell; it certainly was not hunger, for they declined my proffered biscuits. Ere I was done with supper that night, a heavy step sounded outside and the next moment Kenneth entered. He would not share my meal, and while I was eating he brought in some wood from the shed and proceeded to split and saw it for kindling. Our talk ran on the work and the workers. After a remark I made on the way the women were driven, Kenneth asked in a tone of curiosity,

"What made ye tak' up this way o' daein', Jamie?"

I explained to Kenneth that I had become concerned about working-people, and anxious to see them more comfortable and independent. At last I saw that the only way, at any rate the first way, to help them was to come off their back. You can't lift a man as long as you are sitting on him. Come off his back and the chances are he will lift himself. As soon as I saw this truth I acted on it. I had been in a situation where I was over the workers and drove them on; I gave that up, came down to their level, and was now a worker myself.

Finding him sympathetic, I went on to say that well-to-do people appeared to have the notion that unless they ruled and managed the workers, things would go to perdition. The truth was, it was these very rulers and managers that were sending things to perdition. If they stopped meddling with the workers and tried to make a living with their own hands,

the workers would soon put themselves right.

"Dash the doot o' that, Jamie," said Kenneth. "If a man had grund and was free to work it for himsel' and his family, what's to hinder him frae makin' a livin'? What need has

he o' anybody ower him?"

While we talked he had been busy with the firewood, and had afterwards fixed the stove-pipe, which threatened to

come to pieces. The talk had brightened me, and when Kenneth took one of the cartridges from a ledge to examine it, I asked,

"Do you care for a shot?"

He shook his head.

"We could go up anyway and see if there are any rabbits

about," I suggested.

I no sooner appeared outside with the gun under my arm than the collie slunk off and made down the road. Kenneth told me it could not bear the sight of the gun. Probably it had been fired at on some occasion. The little fox-terrier, on the other hand, attended us with evident delight, and had the sense neither to give a bark nor to run far ahead. We strolled up the woodside, and the rabbits came scuttling out from among the rasps. I did not fire, however, as I had noticed that first evening that the most of them were to be found at the top corner round the bend of the wood. I picked out a fair-sized one and knocked it over, though I did not kill it outright. It gave a kick or two, but the foxy was on it in a moment, worrying out its life. I saw that my butcher's bill would not be heavy so long as I had the gun.

That was a night of visitors. On our way back we were met by two lads belonging to Sparkwell House, the mansion in the lower part of the wood—one a stable-boy, the other a 'prentice-gardener. The young horseman had a concertina on which he rendered Corn-crakes among the whinny knowes till his hearers had no excuse for not being perfect in the tune. Then his mate produced a pack of cards, and we played Catch-the-ten, followed by Nap for "spunks." It was near midnight ere my guests, human and canine, bade me each in

his own way a friendly good-night.

The next day Cowbrough was only with us for two hours in the morning; he had to attend the weekly fruit-market in the great city. We worked, if not as slavishly, certainly with as good results, and we did not feel the work, for we had peace. Near the dinner-hour rain came on. The workers hung on a while on the chance of its fairing, then made for home. Kenneth and I were at joiner-work all the afternoon. Behind the fruit-house were piles of empty crates, strong wooden boxes, three feet long, one broad, two deep. A crate held three rows of punnets, tier above tier, the two upper rows resting on thin shelves. Many of these shelves

were missing. No wonder. I used them for kindling-stuff when the rasp-canes were damp, and I suspected the woman Macdermott did the same.

On the Saturday the pickers dropped at one o'clock, and were paid at the fruit-house by Cowbrough's wife and son. After Kenneth had been paid, Cowbrough called to his son, "Take three-and-fourpence off a pound," and indicated that I should have the remainder. My pay was therefore to be a pound per week. It was exactly a quarter of what I had been drawing; yet I never took money with greater satisfaction. After the pickers left, Kenneth and I had to set the fruit-crates in order, and we were not finished till our usual

hour, five o'clock.

We had arranged that I should call for him in the evening and accompany him into Craigkenneth. His home was in the village, a but-and-ben in a thatched row, the only houses of the kind still left. Even they had foregone their dignity as relics, for the thatched roof, instead of being renewed, had been covered with corrugated iron. When I knocked at the outer door, or doors rather, for it was in two halves, my friend's voice called, "Come in, Jamie; in this way," and turning to the left I found myself in the kitchen. Kenneth, with clean face and brushed hair, attired in his best trousers, a striped wincey shirt and white collar, was sitting on a plain wooden chair and holding himself steady to let his mother pin down to his shirt the knot-tie she had just fastened.

"This is Mr. Bryce, mither," he added, as his mother

finished her task and turned to me.

Somewhat to my surprise she did not take my offered hand. Yet there was the true tone of welcome in her voice as she said.

"We're pleased to have ye under our roof, sir. Kenneth

speaks often, often o' you."

She was evidently very old, and, though she must have been fairly tall in her prime, she was much drawn together with age, besides being crippled as if with rheumatism. Her face had a calm yet serious expression, "neither sad nor joyous," that I sometimes remark among the aged poor. It was from her that Kenneth had his good features, though her eyes, which were large and shining, were a dark hazel.

On the table before the little window tea had been set, and I took a cup with my two friends. More than once the old

body surprised me a little by stroking my arm as she sat near me.

"Are ye tired, Jamie?" Kenneth asked ere we were well

seated. It was a common question with him.

I told him I was feeling fresher than I had done since starting, and added with a laugh that I wasn't going to die among the strawberries, after all.

"Kenneth tells me ye've nae mother?" the old woman

inquired.

"No; she died when I was quite young."

"Ay, she'd ha' been wae for ye, and yet she'd ha' been prood o' ye tae. It's a hard, hard lot, but ye'll no gang

without a reward for standin' up for the poor.'

It was my first word of encouragement. It shamed and humbled me, so poorly was it deserved; yet spoken by one so old, spoken too with such sincerity and feeling, it almost melted me to tears. Perhaps it affected me the more that I had just made a discovery about the speaker: Kenneth's mother was blind.

My friend seemed impatient to be off, if impatience could be attributed to one so deliberate in all his ways; so we were soon on the road, after the old woman had given her promise not to sit up late. Though it was now eight o'clock, the sun was still well above the horizon and the western sky glowed with golden light. Kenneth, I soon noticed, had a trick of sweeping the heavens with a long and comprehensive glance, and after one of these surveys he addressed me with the question,

"Wad ye say, Jamie, that the Universe is infinite, or d'ye

think it has boonds?"

The words were so unexpected that I could only respond with a counter-question,

"What do you mean, Kenneth?"

"Weel, Jamie, ye ken that the sun there is the centre o' oor system. The earth and the rest o' the planets move roond the sun. Noo, ye wad think that the sun and ither stars maun mak' up a bigger system and move roond some bigger body that is to them what the sun is to us. Then that bigger body and its neebours will move roond some ane bigger still, and so the thing will go on without end. D'ye no think sae, Jamie?"

It was the first hint given me that Kenneth knew or cared anything about such problems. Had my friend started talking

Chinese, I could not have been more amazed, and my wonder did not diminish as he proceeded in slow speech but with lucid reasoning to show that we could not conceive a limit to space; even if grosser matter ended, something finer, but quite as real, must be present. I was not versed in this lore, and my

companion had most of the talk to himself.

On entering the town Kenneth halted at the first public-house and suggested a glass of beer. To him, perhaps, this little dissipation was a sign that the week's toil was over, and that we had before us a few hours' rest and pleasure. That, at least, was how it appeared to me-after the drink. A few minutes' easy walking and we were at the Steeple. Nothing seemed changed since the nights when Dannie Martin and I used to frequent the spot, though five good years had passed since I had been at the Steeple of a Saturday night. The ploughmen were still gathered in a shifting crowd as they had been in the old days; some even that I knew then were here to-night. though altered more or less, and of course many were known to me from my long sojourn at the estate office. These last, I could see, were discussing me; but I no longer feared to look them in the face. To those whom I used to greet in my lordly days with a patronising nod I nodded now, though not with the same air, and they responded, most of them cordially enough. Beyond the Steeple we passed the Salvation Army roaring out a hymn, then we reached Guild Street, the thoroughfare that leads to the Wynd regions and the castle. It was a moving mass: townsfolk, country-folk, drunk, sober, all contributing to the wild hubbub. Street-vendors, standing just clear of the kerb, were offering the latest things in shirtstuds or children's toys, or halting their barrows to sound the praises of their damaged strawberries, or calling "Hot chips!" from the box of their donkey-vans; street-singers were wailing at every dozen yards, and when we were halfway up the thoroughfare an elderly man, haggard, starved-looking, dressed in rags, stepped from the pavement into the street with a penny whistle raised for action. I paused a moment, curious to hear what strain such a woeful wretch would raise; it was I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls. I thought of the contrast between the dream and the truth; I thought, too, of Nina, poor Nina! who used to render that song superbly. Climbing the street we began to meet our acquaintances of the strawberry field. The girls were dancing along, a m-in-arm,

exchanging chaff with the corner-boys. A few of them were in their best attire; some were just as they had been at work; the most had compromised and appeared in clean petticoat and shawl, their faces well scrubbed, their hair in curling-pins as if waiting for the Sunday's display. Sarah and Annie, both smartly dressed but bare-headed, made up to us and asked to be treated to a fish supper. We got away by suggesting that we might see them later. At the top of Guild Street we reached the Wynds and were done with respectability. The transition was evidenced by this: all the denizens of this new region, the young girls excepted, wore their every-day garb. The navvies, who staggered about and shouted and fought, bore on their moleskins splashes of clay from the drains they had left a few hours before; the women, who gave them oath for oath, were in dirty shortgown and petticoat.

"So you like this bit of the town best?" I said to Kenneth, as I noticed how he had relaxed and made himself at home.

"Ay, Jamie; this is Nature. The folks here hae nae pretence about them; they let ye see them just as they are. And you don't need to put on ony show or mak'-believe either. And that's what I like."

"They certainly show themselves very much as they are,"

I admitted.

"Although," resumed Kenneth, "I don't a'thegither gie in wi' their ways either. I think ye could be natural and yet be quiet and decent. A lot o' them go beyond the boonds o'

decency and mak' beasts o' themselves."

When we returned to the principal streets and were thinking of home, Kenneth suggested a parting glass in the Royal Hotel bar; the beer there was good. I knew that, for I had often sampled it in my factor days. The bar was crowded, by well-dressed townsmen mostly, though the ruddy faces of ploughmen showed here and there. Every bench and chair was occupied, and at the counter, where we had to stand, the crush was so great that Kenneth and I were forced apart and each had to find standing-room where he could. I was well through with my drink when someone at my elbow accosted me.

"Excuse me, but if you've about finished with your beer, you might take up this whisky. I've never touched it. I stood a friend a glass, and he insisted on standing me one

before he left; but I felt I had enough already, and I haven't

taken a drop."

I had turned to survey the stranger who made this friendly offer. He was a man somewhere about forty-five, short and slight, with small features and a pale though healthy complexion. His hair was black and his face was clean-shaven, except for little bits of side-whiskers. We passed a word or two about the heat and the crush, as I sipped his whisky; then my friend, who seemed a Cockney from his talk, said,

"Excuse me, but don't you think you'd be better at some other job, some easier job?" I eyed him questioningly, and he continued, "I've seen you among the strawberries. I'm

with Mr. Curror, just below you."

"Oh! At Sparkwell House," I said.

"Yes. I know what I'm talking about," he went on, "for I've been in a lighter situation myself. I'm a groom to trade, but I was out of a place for a while and had to take labouring work in gardens, and I find it very heavy. And when I saw you running about in the heat, I thought it a pity you had such hard work, for I understand you're a good scholar and could fill a good situation. A clerk's place, now—wouldn't that suit you better? It's more like you; you'd find it much lighter."

I was amused. His notions were so natural, so shallow and

foolish.

"I have been at such work," I explained, "and left it just because it was light and genteel. I wanted to be at something useful. It's lighter work and cleaner work to sit in an office and handle a pen, but what does it mean? It means that some other body must be doing the heavy and dirty work for you as well as for himself, providing food and clothes and so forth for you. I felt that wasn't fair; I must do my share. So I tried to get work on farms and market-gardens, but couldn't. Then I tried Cowbrough's fruit-place, and got in there. That's raising food of a kind, and while I'm at that I feel I'm doing something useful."

The ex-groom looked mystified. After a little he said,

"That's right enough; but I hold that a man must consider himself. Everybody does. Why, only last week there Mr. Curror came round to the garden to me, and he says, 'Wordley, they're getting up a subscription to raise the clergyman's stipend; could you give a little? Mr. Greig

has only £250 a year; it's far too little for a man in his position. I said, 'No, Mr. Curror; I'm sorry I can't see my way to give anything. Mr. Greig goes about with a good coat on his back and hasn't the hard work I have, and I don't get £250 a year. I think he has more need to help me than I have to give him anything. Other people may be able to spare him something, but I'm not.' And he went away not very pleased-looking, but I wasn't minding."

By this the bar was being cleared; so we said good-night, and I had no further chance at the time of hearing my new friend's views on economics. Kenneth and I had a final saunter through the streets, then set our faces towards

home.

Though the night was moonless, it was the night of midsummer, and thought could not associate it with darkness. Overhead was the dark-blue vault with here and there a star, and in front, above the western peaks, the pure hyaline yet lingered. Above the sheeny space shone the evening star.

"Venus is the evenin' star the noo," remarked my com-

panion.

It may have been the planet's influence that gave Kenneth's thoughts their next turn.

"My mither 'll be glad to see me hame sae sune, Jamie.

It's aye twelve at the earliest ere I'm back."

"And do you just wander about the streets all these hours after the public-houses close?"

"No, no, Jamie. I spend the nicht wi' the lasses."

The confession had been made with even more than his usual caution and tentativeness, and as I offered no response he may have taken my silence for disapproval, for he asked,

"D'ye no approve o' that Jamie?"

"Well, Kenneth," I said, "it depends a good deal on what you mean. If you mean that you're courting some woman with a view to marriage, well—"

"Ay, but I've nae thocht o' that. I gang wi' ony ane I

can pick up."

"You don't mean the strawberry-workers?"

" No exactly, Jamie."

"They're hardly girls on the street. You wouldn't say

so, would you?"

"No quite, Jamie. Maybe hauf and hauf. They work for a living, but a lot o' them wadna object to eke it oot by something else. But there's plenty in the Wynds that live by what they can make off men."
"And it's with them you go?"

"Ay." As I made no comment, he went on, "It's nature, Jamie. A' the animals do 't, and we're just animals. wadna say there was onything wrang in 't, wad ye, Jamie?"

"Well, here's how I'd be inclined to look at it. Girls wouldn't make their living in that way unless there were men who used them. So that it's the men who are responsible. Now, suppose you had a sister, Kenneth; would you like her to be leading such a life, and would you think well of the men

who were encouraging her to do it?"

The argument did not touch Kenneth, perhaps because he had never had a sister. He repeated that it was a natural thing for man and woman, as natural as for the beasts, and in the calm tone of the man of science, who looks at all things and is shocked at nothing, he went on to instance bulls and dogs and cocks that not only courted promiscuously but would even make up to their own mothers or daughters. I tried him another way.

"You say that it's natural for the lower animals to do this and that, and no doubt it is. Have they any notion of another way of living than the one they are following? I mean to say, they eat when they're hungry, they gratify their other senses when they have the desire and the chance, and I suppose they never had a thought that they might do otherwise, that they might restrain themselves sometimes. That is so, isn't

it ? "

"Ay, Jamie; I daursay it is."

"But man has this idea. He has the feeling at times that he need not gratify his senses, indeed, should not gratify them, that he might be doing something better."

"Ay, Jamie, but that's merely the effect o' custom or convention-what ye ca' convention, Jamie. It's a notion that has been put into us frae the ootside, by education and law and sic-like. It's no the teachin' o' Nature. If we lived accordin' to Nature, we wad dae just the same as the animals, tak' oor fill o' meat and drink and ither things whenever we felt inclined."

I felt that Kenneth was no 'prentice in the art of thinking. He had reflected on the starry heavens above him and the moral law within him, and I was a novice by comparison. I

was not convinced by his reasoning; indeed, I felt it had a

flaw, though I could not point it out at the moment.

Blessed was my rest that night. No alarm to set, no whistle to fear for the morrow. It was far into the Sunday morning when I woke, and I lay waking a long time, watching the sunlight streaming in by the chinks of my wooden walls and dreaming of things far off and near at hand. My thoughts were pleasant. Recalling the kind and dear ones left in the old life, I felt no melancholy; looking to my present situation, I was inspired with courage and hope. The first week of toil was over and I still lived; more, I felt equal to the work, straining as it was. And how sustaining to know that though it was performed under unnatural, ay, inhuman, conditions, the work itself was natural and useful. Lucky was I to have lighted on such a spot! How, where, could I have done better?

While I was filling my kettle from the crystal well and washing myself in the trough, the kirk-bell down the brae was ringing for morning service, and the fainter music from Craigkenneth steeples reached me from the east. After breakfast I climbed a knoll in the middle of the strawberryfield and gazed long at the broad prospect that spread, bright and clear, under the morning sun. Often I turned eastward, with no devotee's motive, I confess, but in the endeavour to distinguish old familiar haunts. In this direction, however and only in this, the view was intercepted, for a wood on this side bounded the strawberry-field. Then it occurred to me that this was the first time I had surveyed the landscape since I started work five days ogo. Though but a glance was needed to enjoy one of the loveliest scenes of the world, my time, my thought, my strength had all been needed for the daily task, and I had never been able to spare that glance. At the end of a working-day I could have told whether it had been wet or sunny, but how the fair country looked I knew no more than if I had been living in a dungeon.

I did not encourage this strain of reflection, for I felt the time for it was not yet; besides, I had another subject for thought. The talk I had had with Kenneth the night before still interested me, and I tried to make my opinions clearer to myself than I had done to him. My friend came sauntering up in the afternoon, and we spent the rest of the day among the strawberries, for Cowbrough had charged me to remain

on the ground for fear of raiders. Ere I could resume the last night's discussion, Kenneth had started another almost as important. It was his custom on Sundays, he told me, to read the weekly paper to his old mother, and that forenoon he had been reading the trial of a notorious criminal who had been condemned to death for murdering his paramour. Kenneth's views of crime and punishment, I found, were original.

"I dinna see that one body has a richt to punish anither. If we just look at oorsel's, we've a' plenty o' bad in us and we're no fit to judge oor neebours. We're as bad as them;

only it may be a different kind o' badness."

I stated some obvious difficulties, not that I was opposed to my friend's views, but because I liked to "see him think." It may have been his fondness for contemplating the infinite and eternal—the starry heavens, the æons of existence—that gave him his power of surveying moral problems with a great wide sweep; or, more likely, it was in him from the first. It certainly was fresh and stimulating to me. When we had discussed this new question for a while I brought him back to the other.

"Here's what I wanted to say last night, Kenneth, only I couldn't express myself quite clearly. You spoke as if life should consist in gratifying the bodily senses, in getting the best food, the finest drink, the prettiest women, and so on. Wasn't that your meaning?"

"Ay, Jamie, so long as we dinna interfere wi' oor neebours. If we were likely to dae harm to them, we should draw the

line there."

"Well, suppose for the moment that we could get all this sensual pleasure without harming other people in the least; suppose roast beef and bottles of whisky and fine-looking girls grew on trees in such abundance that every man might have all he wanted for the plucking; you would say he should pluck them, and couldn't do better?"

"Ay, Jamie; I see nae objection."

"Well, but there's another way of looking at this body of ours. We may look on it not as a thing to be pampered and gratified, but as an instrument for doing the work of the soul. By 'soul' I mean just the thinking power in us; it doesn't matter whether you call it soul or spirit or thought or anything else. It's a power or a nature that man has and

the lower animals have not, at any rate have not in the same degree or anything like it. Well, may it not be that this soul, this spiritual nature, is the important thing in man, is the power that ought to rule, and that the body should be looked on as the instrument for doing its work? Here's how I'll make it plain, Kenneth. A man has a spade. Well, what should we think of him if he hung the spade up and polished it, and spent his time serving it and worshipping it? Shouldn't we say that he was turning things topsyturvy? The spade is meant for doing the man's work. Now, it may be that the body is the spade of the soul, the instrument that the soul needs, and ought to use, for doing its work."

"I see, Jamie," said Kenneth. A moment later he added, "I never thocht o't that way afore."

I must say I was not a little puffed up at having given my

reflective friend a new thought.

"But, Jamie," asked Kenneth after a short silence, "what wad ye say was the work that the soul should use the body for?"

"Here's how I should look at it, Kenneth. What is true life? When is a man truly living? He is truly living when he is living up to, at least trying to live up to, the highest and best that's in him, all that he feels and knows to be best. Don't you think so?"

Kenneth reflected a moment, then answered,

"Ay, Jamie."

"Well, the highest and best feeling that's in man is, I think, love for all his fellow-creatures and desire for their good. I don't know of anything better. Do you, Kenneth?"

"No, Jamie. That's the best I can think o'—to hae a kindly feeling to everybody and everything. I tak' it, that's

what ye mean, Jamie?"

"That's it exactly, Kenneth; to have a desire for the good of everybody, and even, as you say, of everything that exists. But, of course, this desire must show itself in action. Love that didn't do something for the good of the loved one would be no love at all. Well, it's by means of the body that this love expresses itself; it's with the bodily organs that we speak kind words and do helpful acts to our neighbours. And it seems to me that the main thing for one to do who is concerned about his fellow-creatures and wants to help them

is simply to start getting his living with his own hands, in fact, to become a common labourer, and so take himself off the workers' backs. That should be the first thing, anyway,

and of course it's with the body that we do that."

I had been watching Kenneth as I made my points, and I saw that he followed me intelligently. When I was done he gave me a sidelong glance which expressed more than interest, something of surprise, namely, as if he had got more than he looked for. He made no comment for a little, and when he did speak, all he said was,

"Ye're a thinker, Jamie."

I was flattered, and had I known my friend as I came to know him later I should have rated the praise still higher. Kenneth, I found, divided the human family into two classes—"thinkers," very few, and "nae thinkers," the vast mass of humanity; and even when admitting of some rare acquaint-ance that he was a thinker, Kenneth had occasionally to qualify the acknowledgment with "He's no the finished article." Seemingly he made no qualification in my case, for from this date he evinced a disposition to refer to me as a final authority on all abstract problems. Happily, I did not covet the rôle of oracle; nor did I for a moment think myself worthy to fill it.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THEN I engaged with Cowbrough, I had a fear that he might make a distinction between myself and the other hands and treat me as if I still belonged to his set. Ere the first day was over I knew the fear was groundless. The old fellow did not care what I had been; all he was concerned about was to get as much work out of me as he could. I had to take a turn at anything. If women were scarce or an order had to be filled at short notice, I was sent to pick. My first afternoon at that task will never be forgotten. By the end of the first hour the small of my back felt as if it were slit with a knife; a worm when the spade is going through it—I was like that. I wriggled and writhed, seeking some posture that would give ease and yet let me work without intermission, for to stop and straighten my back would have brought on me a round of savage jeers. After another hour the pain was bearable. That night I was completely done; yet this was work that women and even children did for ten hours every day.

Once there was a scarcity of boys; some of them were ill. I had to help at carrying the board of punnets. When it was laid on my head it was like to crush me to the earth. Then there was the difficulty of keeping a steady footing down the hill; one slip and the precious load would be wasted. As it happened, too, we were pulling that day at the far corner of the field, so that I had a good quarter of a mile to cover. When I did reach the fruit-house and was helped off with the board, what relief! blessed! unspeakable! Yet boys of twelve walked under that load without a stagger. Of course, there are tricks in all tasks. Ere starting with the next load I took care to have it evenly poised on my head; that was a great help. And one of the boys gave me a useful hint. He told me to stuff my cap with strawberry-leaves. The padding saved my skull wonderfully

After sampling the different tasks I was not surprised at the workers occasionally breaking down. They were at a disadvantage, too, as compared with me: they had a three-miles tramp morning and night. We started work, as I have said, at half-past six, and sometimes even, when specially busy, as early as four. Then many of the women had to make their own meals and do all their housework. How they found any time for sleep it was not easy to see. More than that. I often heard voices in the shed before I was up. A few of the oldest women, two of them with their grandchildren, came so early to have an hour's rest between their long tramp and their work. When old Biddy Harkins quietly explained

that to me, I felt queer.

It was noticeable that the old women rarely broke down. Mere skeletons, the wrinkled skin showing every bone, they had been used to heavy, long-continued work from childhood, and they went on like machines. They had resources, too, disdained by the younger folks. All smoked, when not at work, and no mild brand either, but the blackest of twist in the shortest and blackest of cutties. At times, too, even on the field, they furtively snatched from beneath their shortgowns battered tin boxes and with bony fingers extracted huge pinches of Taddy that were soon engulfed in their yawning nostrils. These old bodies grew very interesting to me. At the dinner half-hour I used to listen to them jabbering in Erse, doubtless recalling scenes familiar to them in old Ireland long, long ago. Sometimes I joined them and got in my own tongue something of their history. Yes, every one of those poor creatures had a history—to herself all-important, Old Kate Finneran told me, for instance, that she was born in County Mayo-Ballina, I think, was the name of the placeand lived there till she was fourteen. Some older brothers and sisters had gone to America, and one brother sent money to take her over as well. But her father-" he was fonder, sure, of other people's children than his own "-gave the money to a niece who wanted out. Kate came to this country with a band of shearers in the days when hand and hook did the work now done by the self-binder; at a Highland farm where she was harvesting the farmer's folk took a fancy to her, partly because she could talk to them in their own tongue, and induced her to stay as servant. Kate never saw old Ireland more. Macdermott, the woman who looked

after the hot plate-she was not old, however, and was one of the best pickers-was so given to sculduddery that I thought poorly of her for a while; afterwards I gathered that she was the sole bread-winner of the household, was up great part of the night washing and mending for her young children and bedridden husband, and even on Saturday afternoons went out to earn a shilling by charing. The young women were mostly good-looking, their complexions not greatly coarsened by exposure, their figures not yet pulled out of shape by their straining toil. Irish all by blood, though born this side the water, and speaking not with the brogue but in the passable grammar and vulgar accent that compulsory schooling has made common. They might be heard talking of motor-caps and new costumes and threepence-a-head dances, of strolls with soldiers along the Back Walk, of "captures" on Saturday nights when well-to-do fellows made their way into the Wynd regions. Indeed, their talk, except for differences in details, was very like what I had heard from young ladies with white hands and carefully preserved complexions. There was this striking difference, certainly: with my new friends every other word was obscene; but the obscenity, being coarse and undisguised, had rather a disgusting effect; there was none of that suggestiveness that is so much more dangerous for the passions. Some of the girls, Sarah notably, pestered me with their offers till they understood that my thoughts were not tending that way; after that they were content to be friends, treating me with a freedom that would have seemed appalling to strangers though I soon thought nothing of it. The lovers they seriously cared for were, I found, the young Yahoos who had been brought up in the same conditions. That many of the soldiers were sprung from this class would no doubt explain the good understanding that existed between them and my girl-friends.

The hungry street-Arab flattens his nose on the windows of pastry-shops, and the strawberry-girls must have taken some such way of gratifying their desire for finery. Their pay could not have allowed them to make a nearer acquaint-ance with it. The wages were graded, from two shillings, the pay of the best pickers, to ninepence or tenpence, the rate for children. This was for a ten hour's day. Overtime was paid extra, but then broken time, owing to bad weather, had to be reckoned with. I saw from my time-book that even the

first-rate pickers did not average eight shillings a week. And this was for the best of the season, when there was nothing but the weather to keep them from constant work. Once the strawberries were over, many of them could never earn a shilling.

Whether Cowbrough could have afforded them a higher wage I had no means of ascertaining. His strawberries were sold to private customers at sixpence per pound for "tables" and fourpence for "jams." A paying price. But then it was only a trifling quantity of the fruit that could be disposed of in this way. A lot was sent in to the Craigkenneth shops, more to the market in the great city, more still to the jam factories. For all this he would have a very moderate return. My private

notion was that it took him a struggle to keep floating.

The weeks passed, and I came to live entirely in this little world of strawberries as if the world without did not exist. I never left the fruit-field except of an evening, when I went down to the Well for provisions, and on Saturday nights when I accompanied Kenneth to town. I read nothing, not even a newspaper, heard nothing of noted men or great events, the fate of parties or of nations. I talked only of strawberries or the things that interested the strawberry-workers. Even with Kenneth on Sundays I ceased to speak of the motives that had made me choose this life, and listened rather to my friend's speculations about the age of the earth or the destiny of the solar system. Stupefied with the wearing, incessant toil, I merely worked, ate, slept. It was well for me, I daresay. Had I had time for thought, the memories of all that had once been mine, of dear friendship and love, would have surged over me and I might have perished under the waves.

But there was something more. I deliberately surrendered myself to the stupefying influence. I had an instinct that for a season I must give myself up utterly to this new life of labour, and not reflect on it, far less speak of it. And so I let my soul be sent to sleep, for I knew that an awakening-hour would come.

Meanwhile Nature, with whom I now lived so close, brought things before me that for all my weariness and preoccupation I could not fail to note. At gloaming the kestrel would yelp in the wood or the night-jar would churr. At early morn, as I drew water from the crystal well, I would be greeted by the "quack" of a heron returning from a night's poaching on some mountain stream. Sometimes, while I sat at my evening meal, the squirrel would skip by, pausing to look in

at the open door of my hut, and showing not the slightest fear of the collie and foxy if they happened to be keeping me company. More than once, strolling up the woodside with the gun, I was about to aim at what I took for a rabbit, but found, on coming up, to be a hedgehog with its muzzle buried in the breast of a thrush that Cowbrough must have shot.

Things there were, too, of human interest, unlooked for and not without their comic side. One Sunday afternoon Cowbrough visited the field, as he often did. While sauntering along to meet him I spied in an alley a full punnet which the boys had overlooked the day before. There would be a wild storm, I knew, if the old fellow saw it. Luckily it was quite near. I strolled along the alley and, without looking down at the punnet, shoved it in among the strawberries with my foot. Then I hastened forward, searching the while for some excuse to draw Cowbrough away from that part of the field. None would come to my slow brain; on the old man stumped, and at the end of the alley his hawk-eye caught the white chip though only a corner was visible.

"Eh!" he cried, alert on the instant; and he hobbled up with all speed. Then, pointing at the punnet with his stick, he went on, "Look there! I don't blame the boys for not seeing that. It's these damned women. They will persist in sticking the punnets into the bed, though I've told them a thousand times to lay them out on the alleys where the boys

have a chance to see them."

I laughed, and he gave me an angry glance, though the cause of my amusement he does not know to this hour.

But this was nothing to what happened just a week later. On the Saturday forenoon we started to the late strawberries—the Eltons. The crop was exceedingly heavy, and the big squad of pickers filled the punnets much faster than the boys and men could clear them away. While we were at our busiest, word suddenly came to shift to a break of Presidents: enough Eltons were in to fill the order. We had to leave instantly; it was near noon and the women would be off at one. I knew there would be some full punnets still lying among the Eltons, and I settled in my own mind that I should lift them in the afternoon. Unfortunately I omitted to mention this to Kenneth and it escaped my memory. On the Sunday forenoon Joe and Andra, the lads from Sparkwell House, came up, and as the foxy was with me at the time we took him

to the top of the field to hunt rabbits in the hedge-roots. Working along we reached the Eltons, and then for the first time the punnets came to mind. I stepped into the bed and spied one almost instantly. I slipped it among the plants and said nothing, for I was afraid the lads might blab. They were too intent on their sport to notice me, and were they once past the break of Eltons I was safe. As it happened, however, it was near their dinner-hour, and they had to leave before we had reached the end of the stretch. They came through the Eltons on their way down, and of course could not miss the punnets. Two were found within a few yards. Seeing concealment was useless, I told the lads to make a thorough search: we had been called off suddenly the day before and there would be a good many punnets about. We found them thick. To the lads it was the rarest fun; at every fresh discovery their mirth grew more uproarious till at last they were nearly helpless. I was not quite so merry, for I knew that if old Cowbrough appeared—and he might arrive at any moment—he would not treat the affair as a joke. Nine punnets in all were found; at sixpence apiece they meant a loss to Cowbrough of four-and-six. How to dispose of the strawberries? The lads were ready enough to fill both their stomachs and their pockets; still, they could not stow away such a quantity. We cut open their jacket-lining, and I poured in the strawberries till they came halfway up their back. When all was done we had to bury a punnetful near the hut. There was still the fear that the lads on their way home might be challenged by the local policeman, who had orders to give a look to the field on Sundays. Even if all other risks were passed, the lads might blab the fine adventure and old Cowbrough might get the story.

There was an Irishman that Cowbrough employed to drive his fruit-van, a fellow about five-and-thirty, clever-handed, civil enough, with queer ways though, if the women, with whom he was not a favourite, spoke truth. They were likely to know, for he came from the Wynds. Once when Philip was looking at a rabbit I had shot he suggested that I should try the snaring, and told me he could provide the snares. I consented to use them on the understanding that anything I caught should fall to him; the gun kept me in all I needed. He brought nine, which I set along the woodside wherever there was a good run below the wire netting. First

thing the next morning I went up to look them. It was fullmoon, I remember, and ere I had gone far I saw two big rabbits making through the netting into the wood. So I thought at first: but as I came nearer they did not decamp, though they were jumping briskly, and it then occurred to me that they might be prisoners. They were. Only I had made the noose of the snares too wide, and the rabbits, instead of being caught by the neck and choked, had got through their front paws as well as their heads, and were held tightly by the middle. A third rabbit, also large, was caught in the same way near the top of the wood. Philip was highly pleased with my success, and took the rabbits into Craigkenneth with his first load. The next night I caught one, and that a young thing. Though I had made the nooses smaller, it too was caught by the body. After that I did not capture one, and yet I knew, for I saw them in my evening strolls, that the rabbits came into the field as freely as ever. When I had set and looked the snares for a week of nights and mornings and had taken nothing, I was for giving them back. Philip was loth to take them; he asked me, as a favour, to keep two or three at least and set them in runs in the rasp plantation. The first morning I had one victim, again a young creature. It had been caught in proper fashion and strangled. No more were captured though I kept the snares set, and indeed left them out even by day. The workers had no occasion to be among the rasps at that season, and the keepers on the estate were seldom round that way, and were not likely to notice anything suspicious though they did pass. After some days I grew careless and often left the snares unvisited. We were nearly through with the strawberry harvest when a change in the weather set in and culminated in a storm of wind and rain that lashed my roof the whole night through, made the elm-boughs thump on the resounding iron, knocked my stove-pipe to pieces, and was like to do the same with the hut itself. By morning the wind had fallen, though the rain still poured. Of course no women were out, but Kenneth arrived about eight o'clock with word from Cowbrough that the two of us were to tidy up the fruit-shed and muck out the pony's stall. First, however, we rigged up the stove-pipe, a longer task than we had counted on; then I proposed that we should have a turn up the woodside with the gun, for I was short of provender. As we moved cautiously on in the thick heavy rain, which prevented us from seeing well or far, Kenneth suddenly touched my arm and whispered,

"See yon, Jamie!"

He was pointing to something in the rasp plantation. As I looked I saw a beast making a plunge and then crouching on the ground. It took me some seconds to interpret its strange movements.

"It's a rabbit in one of the girns," I said at last.
"By God! it's a monster, Jamie," said my friend.

We approached, and the nearer we came the more strange the animal appeared; its hide especially, even when due allowance was made for the effect of the rain, was darker than any rabbit's I had seen. Kenneth, whose eyes are keener than mine, was the first to read the mystery.

"My God! it's a cat, Jamie."

A cat it was, a big brindled Tom, one too that I soon recognised, for I had seen it on the prowl more than once. I had been struck by its tameness on our previous encounters. It feared neither me nor my gun, indeed paid us little attention. I had seen it must be a pet, and concluded it belonged to Sparkwell House. Alas! it looked anything but a home pet this morning, its sodden hair glued to its sides after the wild night's exposure. When we made to release it, it spat and growled, and we had to keep our distance. I went back to the hut with my gun and brought a spade from the tool-shed. The creature seemed exhausted by this time, and we thought we might handle it with safety. Kenneth held down the wire to the ground with the spade so that the cat could not jump about, and I managed to release it from the noose. It made no attempt to escape, but lay on its side, apparently dying. To give it a chance I took off my jacket, rolled the cat inside, and with Kenneth's help, and not without laughter, carried it down to the hut, where I had a fire. On unrolling the bundle we found that poor Tom had crawled down one sleeve and was stuck fast midway, so that we could get him neither down nor up. We knew that if he was near his last gasp before he must be dead now from suffocation, if nothing else; so catching the jacket-sleeve by the end, we shook it as if we had been emptying a bag of potatoes, though sometimes we could scarcely hold it up for laughing. At last Tom dropped on to the floor feet foremost, and the next moment he whipped out of the door, leaving Kenneth and me to stare at each other and then go off in another roar.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

Y the third week of August the strawberries were about over; even before that most of the pickers had left. The children were back at school, some of the women would soon find work at harvesting, others would get into the cloth-mill at Craigkenneth if more hands were needed there, and of the rest the greater number would be idle till the next summer. About a score of women were kept on for the weeding, while the men were sent to "scutch," that is, to go up the alleys, hook in hand, cut the strawberry-runners and at the same time shear away part of the side-leaves. This last process is supposed to benefit the plants, the idea being, I presume, that it strengthens the roots and also opens up the bed. The beds that had been planted the last spring were left unscutched, for the young plants would be needed to make new plantations. The scutching was over in about ten days, and then Kenneth and I started to delve the alleys, a job that was likely to keep us busy all winter. It was on a Monday that we began. Philip should have been with us, but poor Philip was in disgrace. He had gone on the spree on the Saturday night, had wandered out from Craigkenneth on the Sunday very drunk, and had made a disturbance at Cowbrough's house. When he appeared on the Monday morning to make a start along with us, Cowbrough ordered him off the ground. The women, who had an ill word of Philip, declared he would have revenge one way or another; indeed, Macdermott, who believed him capable of all enormities and who had a leaning to the marvellous at any rate, "wouldn't be sorprised if he burnt owld Cowbrough's house about his ears." It was no very enviable job that Philip had lost. The alleys we were to delve were trodden as hard as a turnpike road. More than that; they were covered half a foot deep with the weeds that the women were taking out of the beds, and we had to delve these weeds in and cover them so deeply that not a green blade could be seen. No very lucrative job, either. Cowbrough, following his usual practice, stopped the system of day's-wages when the delving began, and put us on piece-work. The pay was to be twenty-five shillings per acre, the strawberry-beds going into the measurement. When telling me these arrangements Cowbrough said that a good delver could do an acre in a week. Kenneth shook his head when I mentioned this.

"If a body got at it constantly, Jamie, it's hard to say what he micht dae; but there's a lot o' broken time wi' rain and frost. I've never averaged aboon sixteen shillings a week, and that's wi' workin' every hour that wark was possible."

Kenneth and I arranged that instead of working on different parts of the field we should take adjoining alleys on the same break. That would let us be together. We started. Kenneth. stronger than I and—what was more—accustomed to the work, moved up the alley at a rate that made me despair. He looked, too, as if he were not pushing himself. I was fairly strong, as active as most young fellows, and the spade was quite familiar to my hand. But this was not the fine free soil of Lowis gardens. I struggled like a slave and still Kenneth was covering two yards for my one. Though it was September the day was as hot as midsummer; the sweat poured down me in a stream. When we knocked off for the day I could scarcely drag myself over to the hut. My supper, which I would almost have wanted rather than have the trouble of making, was no sooner over than I threw myself down, and in a moment I was sleeping like the dead.

I had slept long, till midnight at least—so I thought—when I was wakened suddenly; something had disturbed me. Ere I had a second to collect my senses, there was a tremendous hammering on the door, and someone in a rough voice and Irish accent threatened to smash in my sanguinary head if I did not open at once. The voice, the accent, could only belong to Philip. He was not alone; I could hear others speaking to him in a whisper, and one of these, also an Irishman, joined in the threats and added the most frightful curses. The door of my hut, as I have mentioned already, was not locked, only fastened inside with a string to keep it from blowing open; my assailants were trying to drive it in; had they known it opened outwards, they could have pulled

it to them with the utmost ease. My behaviour can only be understood and excused if one remembers that I was suddenly and roughly wakened out of a heavy sleep, and recognised in my leading assailant the drunken desperate Irishman of whom I had heard such evil tales. I had not a moment to find my wits; I was not myself; I was in an excited daze. "Yes," I cried, as soon as I was able to say anything, "I'll

let you in."

Even as I spoke I had slid out of bed and groped to the corner where stood the gun. Some loose cartridges always lay on the sill of the wicket beside it; I found them at once and slipped in a couple. Then I stood holding the muzzle close to the inside of the door, my finger on the trigger and ready to pull the moment the door was forced. So the situation remained for some minutes, the Irishmen smashing on the door with their fists, uttering the most blood-curdling threats and occasionally breaking off to confer in whispers, while I stood prepared for the worst, ordering them at times to clear out, but for the most part waiting the issue in silence. The hut was in deep darkness, for though, as I afterwards found, the moon was half-full, its rays could not pierce my wooden walls, and I had not struck a light for fear of making myself a target for missiles. At last the excitement mastered me; after some fearful threats from my besiegers I shouted out as wildly, "Yes, I'll open the door and I'll put some lead into you with this gun," and with my left hand I tore at the string that held the door. My accent must have taught them I was desperate; their feet were heard scampering off at their hardest. The moment the door was unfastened I dashed it open and strode out into the moonlight in my nightshirt, gun ready, defying the world. Nobody accepted the challenge; my assailants, to judge from the sound of their voices, were down the road. After standing some minutes I went into the hut and, heedless of danger now, I struck a match to see the time. It was only nine o'clock. So dumbfounded was I that I thought the alarm must have stopped. No; it was ticking quite regularly. I pulled out my watch from under my pillow. The same story: a few minutes past nine; and I had taken for granted it was midnight. I sat down on the crate and reflected. Was it possible that I had made a frightful blunder? After a little I put on some clothes and went out, this time without the gun. My late assailants were returning, as I could tell from the voices, and were again inside the field, though they seemed to be moving gingerly and making frequent halts. The voices had lost the brogue and sounded familiar. This confirmed the suspicion that had flashed on me, and I called:

"Is that you, Joe?"
There was no answer.

"Come on, man," I shouted.

Then a voice cried, "Will ye no shoot us?"

I reassured them and they moved forward, though warily. But one of the company was less timid: a small white figure detached itself from the group and was soon at my side. It was the foxy. Our friendly meeting seemed to give confidence to the others; they came on with bolder tread, and I recognised them for Joe and Andra. Hearty was our greeting, loud and sincere were my apologies. It seemed they had been investing in a new pack of cards, and had come up after eight—quite a common hour with them and not an unseasonable one-to handsel them with me at Catch-the-ten; finding me asleep, they had started acting the Irishman and burglar, merely in youthful exuberance, with no thought of Philip, with no suspicion that I should be deceived. I in turn told of my mistake and accounted for it, but I don't think they quite accepted, perhaps I should rather say comprehended, the story, nor did they realise, I feel sure, how near they had been to death. From the chance words they dropped to myself and the account of the affair they gave Kenneth, I conclude they had the impression that I had been annoyed at having my sleep disturbed, and had wanted to give them a fright and make them decamp. So hard is it to put oneself in another's skin.

All's well that ends well. Blessed was my escape; yet often since have I shuddered as I thought of what would inevitably have been if those poor lads, instead of beating on my door, had tugged it open. Two lives blotted out, my own ruined. Instead, I have to thank the occurrence for one of the most joyous changes of my life. The first time Cowbrough was up I asked him to take the gun away. As the strawberries were past, there was no need to shoot, or even shoot at, the birds, and I suppose he would think I had tired of rabbit dinners. Up to this the gun had kept me in fleshmeat, and if I was to continue the diet I should have to resort

to the butcher's. A journey down to the Well after a hard day at the spade, especially if I had no other errand, was not enticing; it was put off night after night, and I contented myself with such viands as oatmeal porridge, potatoes, bread, tea, and dairy produce. The fare agreed with me; anything would have agreed with me in that open-air life; and ere the end of the week the question had risen, why not continue it, or try to, at least? I have not spent a penny on butcher-meat since. My health has certainly been as good under the new fare, even though, as time went on, I discarded butter, cheese, eggs, and all animal products. But that is not the important thing. My outlook on Nature was changed. Now, as I wandered up the woodside in the gloaming, the rabbits that whidded off at my approach were no longer my enemies or my prey: they were my friends, for whom I cherished a protective tenderness. So of all creatures wild or domestic: they became to me what the birds had always been. A stranger in a new land who thinks himself girt with foes and suddenly discovers in them friends and kin, such was I. As with other changes in my inward life, the cause was remote and seemingly accidental. Perhaps the truth is that the change was bound to come, though but for that night's adventure it might not have come so soon. At any rate, the circumstances of my life, the movements of my thought, must have been preparing me for it, and when the occasion came it found me ready.

Since then I have gone lengths in this direction that I never contemplated. As I have mentioned, I gave up using animal products of any kind. I came in time to regard all life as akin to my own, and I have let the thought guide me even when it seemed to threaten my interests. In digging the ground, for instance, I stay the spade rather than slice a worm : vermin like rats and mice, destructive as I have proved them to be, I never kill; anything that would entice them I keep out of their way or fence securely, and, above all, I find that a place which is clean and free from rubbish is seldom infested. So that in treating the lower creation considerately I have found a treasure by the way: I have learned to prize and practise thrift and cleanliness. In one matter-in dealing with the larvæ that prey on my garden crops—I lag behind my knowledge. Not only do I endeavour by the use of soot, salt, lime, and the like to make the crops and even the soil distasteful to them (for that I take no shame); but I delve

in those chemical fumigants that are warranted to be sure death to leather-jackets, chafers, and that despair of the horticulturist. the wire-worm. Fortunately, I acknowledge my sin and make no attempt to justify it; I live in hope that I shall yet have courage, whatever be the cost, to follow the good I approve.

Ere many days I could keep up with Kenneth at the delving He was as pleased as I, for now we could work side by side, talking while we worked. We had a good deal of broken time, however, owing to rain, and our earnings were not high. On days when nothing could be done outside I sometimes went down to Kenneth's and got his old mother, who was an expert at knitting, to give me lessons, so that I might have some useful employment for indoors. If rain caught us at the delving, Kenneth and I retired to my hut till it should fair, and, as the few women who still remained in Cowbrough's service could not weed if the ground or the plants were drenched, we had the field at such times to ourselves. It was on one of those occasions, while we were sitting in the hut early of an afternoon, talking of whatever arose, that Kenneth rather upset me with the question,

"Had ye never a lass, Jamie?"

"I-I haven't one now, anyway," I managed to answer. My hesitancy should have made him suspicious; only it was soon evident that he had put the question for the sake of introducing his own love-affairs.

"I had when I was like you, Jamie."

"It strikes me you've a good many yet, Kenneth," I said, laughing.

"Ay, but I had a richt lass, ane that I wad fain hae mairret."

"Why didn't you?"

"My mither wadna let me, Jamie."
I could not help smiling. This great powerful man of about fifty spoke as if he were still a little boy at his mother's foot.

"My mither's been jealous o' me a' my life," he went on; "she wad get fair past hersel' if she thocht I was lookin' at a lassie."

"Was she afraid of losing your pay?"

"No, Jamie; it wasna that awa'. My faither was livin' then and was weel enough aff; he managed the hame farm up at Gartloch there. No; it was just jealousy, what ye wad ca' jealousy, Jamie; she couldna bear that ony ither woman should be first wi' me. She's just the same yet. And that's ane o' the reasons that she's sae fond o' you, Jamie: she thinks

ye keep me frae the hizzies on the Saturday nichts. She's

waur at the hizzies than the drink."

It is true that Kenneth kept by me pretty loyally on those town visits. But he did not tell his mother, and he had cautioned me not to tell her, that he made up for this by taking a run in to the Wynds of a Sunday afternoon when he was supposed to be in my hut.

"And do you think the girl would have married you, Kenneth?" I asked for I saw he wanted to go on with his confidences.

"Ay, Jamie; she gied me her promise, and she seemed as fond o' me as I was o' her."

"How did your mother manage to break it off?"

"Man, Jamie, she just kept at me constantly, never gied me a minute's rest, made my life a misery if she thocht I had been wi' Maggie. And she wad try everything she could to keep me awa' frae her; watched me like a thief. Maggie kent that, and she saw it wad never dae. I saw that mysel', and we just agreed to let the thing drap."

We were both silent a while, each busy with his own thoughts. Then Kenneth resumed in a thoughtful tone,

"I whiles think it wad ha' been better for me if I had gotten

her. What do you think, Jamie?"

"Hard to tell, Kenneth; in fact, it's impossible to tell. We know what has been, but we don't know what might have been. The pair of you might have lived very unhappily together; plenty of married folks do."

"I dinna think we'd ha' dune badly thegither, Jamie. She had a guid deal o' sense, what ye wad ca' soond commonsense, Jamie, and she's made a guid wife to the man she got."

"Oh! she married?"

"Ay, Jamie; she mairret a farmer up by Kilmunnock, Carrick o' Peel."

"I know the man. I often came across him in Stevenson's.

He's in a big way."

"Ay; it was Maggie made a man o' him. She gaed to keep his hoose and he sune mairret her, and he's thriven every day since syne. She was the sort to push a man on. She micht ha' dune the same for me, Jamie."

There was another silence; then Kenneth said,

"I'm no a success, Jamie. Naebody wad ca' me a success."

"It all depends on what one means by that, Kenneth. I suppose nobody would call me a success either."

"No; but then, Jamie, you have the best o' your life afore ye, and the best o' mine's past. No, I havena been a success; onything but that. I'm just a slave; I'm what ye wad ca' a slave, wadn't ye, Jamie?"

"We all are, Kenneth; slaves to our employers, the people

that have the money."

"Ay, but I've nae independence, Jamie. Of coorse, I could leave auld Cowbrough; but I dinna like the idea o' gaun among strange folk askin' wark. I have a backwardness aboot me. And that mak's me hing on here and stand a' Cowbrough's roarin' and cursin'. Ay, Jamie, I'm just Cowbrough's slave."

It was true, yet I could not find it in my heart to say so.

To divert my friend's thoughts a little I asked,

"Have you a weakness for her yet, Kenneth?"

"No very bad, Jamie; just a kin' o' interest, what ye wad ca' an interest, Jamie. I think a man aye has that for the lass he didna get."

"Perhaps you're right, Kenneth. And the lass-will

Maggie still have an interest in you?"

"No; it's quite different wi' her, Jamie. She has a grown-up family, and a mither gets ta'en up wi' her family; they put a' ither folk oot o' her heid. It's just like my mither bein' ta'en up wi' me. My mither 'll never think 'o the lads she used to gang wi' when she was a lassie. And she wad hae lads in plenty, for she wad be a gey braw lass; in fact, she was a braw woman since I mind her, though she's auld and dune noo.'

At Kenneth's words the Time-curtains seemed to dissolve. I looked into a vanished world, a world of two generations ago, and saw a fresh-cheeked, light-footed maid of twenty laughing, singing the livelong day in the thoughtless joy of youth, jesting, trysting with brave young wooers, now old and bent like the old woman down the brae, or mayhap laid to rest long since in the green kirkyard. What changes in the world; what changes in that one poor life since those sunny days and sweet gloamings of sixty years ago! Kenneth must have had some such fancy as well, for when I said,

"That's 'Lang Syne,' Kenneth," he responded,

"Ay, Jamie; it's a' by like a dream. And oor turn 'll come some day; we'll pass awa' and be as if we had never been. We're just like the weeds oot there that we delve into the grund. They live for a year and we live for fifty or sixty,

or it may be eighty year; that's a' the difference; it comes to the same in the end."

This was a favourite thought with Kenneth, though one that I could not altogether make my own. I did not begin an argument, however. The rain that had kept us prisoner in the hut was nearly over and the sky had brightened. With one impulse we rose and sallied forth to resume our toil. Still, I had the feeling that Kenneth had not been doing himself justice, and, anxious to restore him to a due place in his own esteem, I remarked, as we walked up the field,

"You say, Kenneth, that you're not a success, that you're just a slave. That's maybe true. Well, suppose things had fallen out differently; suppose you had married Maggie and had been pushed on till you became a big farmer; what would that mean? It means that you would have a lot of other people slaves to you, and would be driving them on so as to get profit out of them. You would rather be a slave than a slave-driver or a slave-owner. You admit that, Kenneth?"

"Ay, Jamie; I can honestly say that. Though the

proper thing would be to be neither o' them."

"I admit that, Kenneth; though it's a very rare person who is in that happy position. And if one is forced to choose, as you and I are, it's better to have other people taking advantage of us and making profit out of our labour than to be using them for our gain. It's better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. Then, as for the life you've spent, look at it this way, Kenneth. You have worked at a most useful occupation, raising wholesome, natural food for people. Indeed, you see that I gave up such a position as you were inclined to think highly of in order to do the same work as yourself. If I were you, Kenneth, if I had been doing such useful work as long as you, I should think no small potatoes of myself."

'That's ae way to look at it, Jamie," my friend admitted,

and his tone was less pensive.

By this we had climbed the knoll. The rain had passed, all but a few glistening drops, and the sun shone in the fresh blue. Ere I struck my spade into the gravelly soil, I waved my hand toward the retreating clouds in the north, and spouted,

"My heart leaps up when I behold A rainbow in the sky; So was it when my life began, So is it now I am a man.

Kenneth gave his head a shake, but he smiled.

## CHAPTER XXXV

ROKEN time meant broken pay. This mattered little to me, my running expenses were so light. As a set-off the wet spells did me a double good: they rested me, they gave me time to think. In my four months' stay among the strawberries I had tried the different kinds of work, and had learned a good deal about the workers and their employer. Alone and at leisure I reflected on all this. Of much else, too, I thought, of my ploughboy life, of my later career as factor. While I glanced over the past, the main incidents and characters that had once seemed detached and accidental fell into their places as in a picture, till my mind's eye could command and comprehend the whole. To see this was not enough; soon the desire rose to tell what I

saw. Let me say a word about this.

When I left the factor's office and entered on what I felt to be the true life, I had not one thought of becoming a propagandist. I made the change to satisfy my own conscience, to give free course to my true nature; I made it, in a word, because I couldn't help it. Even when I had time for reflection in my hillside solitude, weeks went by ere I dreamt of sharing my thoughts with the public. If I can rightly recall the events of my inner history, the impulse came to me first on a Saturday night when Kenneth and I were standing at Craigkenneth Steeple. We had been up Guild Street as far as the Wynds, hardly forcing our way through the dense rough crowd, and as we found ourselves again at the Steeple I was thinking of all we had seen and heard and of all that was around us now. The throng of workers from country and town, the street-preacher, street-minstrel, street-hawker striving to catch their notice and their pence, the group of young ploughmen close to us, a mulatto giant with a rich voice and fluent tongue lauding his drugs as cures for every ail-here was matter for thought.

"Look at all these folks, Kenneth," I said. "They are the most important people in the world, the ones that are doing real work, useful work, the ones that, if they only saw the way, could make a new world of it. And look at the characters that are appealing to them; most of them are trying to amuse them, to distract them, to keep them from thinking; and the ones that profess to be wanting them to think, like that Salvation Army preacher, are doing worse than all the rest, for they're trying to stuff them with lies and superstitions that any reasonable mind must reject with loathing."

"Ye're quite richt, Jamie," Kenneth assented.

"Sheep without a shepherd, Kenneth," I went on. "They hear all sorts of lies, all sorts of distractions, but one word of truth is never spoken to them, not one."

"No a single word, Jamie," said my friend.

"Then don't you think, Kenneth," I asked, uttering the thought that had been born not a second before, "that it's the duty of one who knows the way to show them it?"

Kenneth gave me one of his sidelong looks, and there was a hint of a smile on his face. The glance told that he was not without curiosity to hear how I might deliver my message, but what he said was.

"It's no worth while, Jamie. What odds will 't mak' a

hunder years efter this?"

I could not have addressed the crowd even if I had had the words to speak and courage to speak them; the black doctor was doing such business, his humour, his eloquence were so acceptable, that he was not likely to quit the stance till his whole stock was cleared.

The next Saturday night was wet and the crowds, instead of being on the street, were in the public-house. I was relieved; it was another good excuse for silence. The following Saturday a cheap-jack, selling watches and trinkets, was at the Steeple as we came up. Again I had the feeling of relief; I could hold my tongue without self-reproach. Kenneth and I had our usual stroll into the Wynd region and on our way back Kenneth halted to speak with some country acquaint-ances I did not know. He had not overtaken me by the time I reached the foot of Guild Street. As I neared the Steeple my heart began thumping: the cheap-jack had stopped.

He had stopped, though he was still at the place, his stand and his brown portmanteau beside him. The bag was shut.

After some hesitation I strolled over, though I did not venture to address him at once. He was a middle-aged, middle-sized man, spare and smart-looking, with yellowish-brown hair, a hook-nose, and good features generally. His attire-what of it I remarked at least, the round felt hat and the long brown great-coat-was old and shabby. After standing a minute or two I stepped a little closer and asked if he was finished for the night.

"No, I am not," he replied with an English accent, speaking

and looking sharply and, as I thought, aggressively.

I said it was all right; I had thought of speaking a little,

but wasn't particular.

My civil tone had soothed him, or perhaps he did not need soothing. He explained that he had merely knocked off for a little to let a new crowd gather. Meantime he was going over the way for a drink, and he nodded towards the Grapes.

"Come along," he said.

I thanked him but declined.

"No? Well, take a quarter of an hour. I'll give you that time."

"Oh, never mind," I said. "Some other night will do as well."

"Atheist?"

"Well, not exactly. At least it's not about that I meant

to speak; it was rather to working-people on social questions."
"There's nothing like it," said the man, though what he meant I don't know to this day, and have often wished to know. "Go ahead, then," he continued. "Take twenty minutes, take half an hour, if you like. I'll get the benefit of the crowd when you've done, and my things 'll be safe

beside you when I'm over the way."

He hung on a little, evidently curious to hear my message; but I had not courage to open my mouth, and when he left me by myself I shrank back beneath the Steeple. Yet it was a pity; here was a chance made for me, here was I encouraged to take it. When might I have another? I stepped out into the street. Then I shrank back once more, but ere I was clear of the causey an impulse took me, and I cried, ay, shouted:

"Working-men and Working-women! I want to speak

to you about the state we are in."

The cry had the effect of the fairy wand at a pantomime. The crowds passing on the pavements were struck motionless,

the shifting throng on the street became as stone figures; every face was turned to the spot beneath the Steeple. I waited a little in hope that the listeners would approach; the only ones who did were some children of the street-Arab sort. Once I had heard my own voice I was quite collected, and it was at a lower pitch, almost indeed in a conversational

tone, that I resumed:

"It is we working-people that do everything that is useful in the world. Some of us work in the country fields, raising corn, potatoes, and other food. Others build houses, make streets and roads, dig out iron and coal. The women among us do things that are quite as necessary. They are employed in factories, attending to the machines that spin and weave cloth, or in warehouses making up the cloth into dresses, or in private houses doing the duties of domestic servants. All the things that are needed to support life—food, houses, clothes, fuel—are turned out by our hands. If we were to stop working, the human race would soon come to an end."

By this there was a fair half-circle about me, made up mostly of young fellows belonging to the town. The ploughmen, all but one or two, were slower to move; they kept to their accustomed spot, where, however, my voice could easily reach them. Something more than curiosity, a certain expectant interest, was in most of the faces before me, and the sight

strengthened my confidence and self-possession.

"Now," I went on, "here comes the strange thing. The things we turn out don't belong to us; they belong to people who never worked at them at all. The ploughman raises corn and potatoes, but the corn and potatoes don't belong to the ploughman; they belong to the farmer, who only watches him and swears at him" ("Good, my son!" from a tall tipsy ploughman whose face was familiar); "and a big part of the value of the corn and potatoes has to be given to a laird who hasn't even the trouble of watching and swearing. The mason and the joiner put up houses, but those houses are to belong to rich people who never handled a mell or a saw in their life." ("Did you ever work in your life?" a young tradesmanlike fellow called out viciously. "He works a damned sicht harder than you," retorted a countryman with a very red face. "What does he work at?" the first speaker demanded. "He's wi' Cowbrough o' the Well." "Ye're a —— liar, then," a third voice broke in, "for he's a factor at Lowis."

After waiting till the wrangle had somewhat quietened I went on.) "Miners dig out coal and iron, railwaymen carry on the work of railways, for the benefit of shareholders who not only don't work, but haven't even a notion of how the work is done. Girls spin and weave cloth which belongs to the factory-owner; other girls make it up into dresses which the warehouseman sells for his profit. Putting the whole thing in one word, I would say this: our food, our clothes, our houses, our coal and iron, come, first or last, from the land; well, the land, with all that's on it or in it, belongs not to us, the working-people, but to a handful of people who do no work at all."

My hearers were now ranged, if the word can be used of such an unruly throng, four and five deep, and the half-moon had rounded to a somewhat irregular circle. There would be at least two hundred persons gathered round me; the outside groups on the pavements and the causey would contain as many more. The audience, too, seemed, for the most part sympathetic.

"And what," I continued, "do we get for the work we do? The rich people for whom we do the work pay us wages, and the wages are usually just enough to keep us fit for working more."

Here a man with a fresh face and grey hair came forward to me, walking very unsteadily. "Look here, chappie," he said, taking me by the front of the jacket, "I want to ask you a question." With most of the audience I looked expectant, and amid comparative stillness he asked, "C-c-can you grow chrysanthemums?" The query and the shout of laughter it called forth disconcerted me somewhat. However, two young fellows got hold of the old jobbing-gardener, for so my heckler proved to be, and drew him back from me in spite of his serious and oft-repeated protest that he "was just askin' a question." I started again:

"Now, some people give you arguments in support of this arrangement and other people give you arguments against it. Some tell us that this arrangement, or an arrangement like it, has been from the beginning; others say that on the whole it is a good arrangement, others again that while it may have some faults it's better than any other that has ever been proposed. On the other side, there are people who deny all that, and who bring fine arguments against it. I want you to-night to put all those arguments on one side or the other out of your

mind, and to ask yourselves just one question. We are born into this world, and when we are old enough to look at things for ourselves we find that all the land about us, with everything that's in it and on it, belongs to a handful of people in every way like ourselves, and that we, who are thousands to their one, haven't a foot of ground to live on, and can only live because those few people find it convenient for themselves to allow us. Now, here's the question I want you to ask yourselves: Is that natural? is that fair? is that right?"

There was a confused shout for reply, the "No's" greatly predominating, and when the noise subsided the tall, red-faced ploughman declared, as if communing with himself, "Damn the bit!" I gave the audience time to settle, then continued:

"We're pretty well agreed, then, that there's no sense or fairness in the present way of doing. The sensible thing, the fair thing, would be that the land shall belong not to a handful of lairds but to the whole people, and that when we work it shall be for ourselves and not for a few masters. (" How can we do without masters?" demanded the young tradesman snappishly. "Keep yer mooth shut an' yer ears open, an' ye'll mebbe hear," a ploughman retorted amid laughter.) "The question now is" ("Wull ye hae a drink?" and roars of laughter)—"the question is" ("Beer or whisky?" and more laughter)—"the question is, how can the change be brought about? Most people up till now have thought, if they thought about the question at all, that the change would be brought about by Parliament. Members of Parliament would abolish the old laws and make new laws for giving justice to us working-people. Till a few years ago those Members of Parliament belonged to one or other of two parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, and both those parties professed to be concerned for our good. And both of them have passed laws that seemed likely to improve our condition. Women and children employed in factories and workshops must have a certain amount of space for each to breathe in, and must not be kept at work for more than so many hours at a stretch; dangerous machinery must be fenced in; workers who meet with accidents in the course of their employment are entitled to compensation from their employers. But where is the Liberal, where is the Conservative, who has ever proposed the one thing we saw was necessary, namely, that the land shall be free to all? If you suggested such a

thing to them, they would take you for a madman. It's evident, then, that we need never expect this from the Liberals or the Conservatives."

Here the young tradesman demanded, "Are you a Socialist?" and when I went on without noticing the interruption he insisted, "Answer the question; answer the question if you're not frightened." I knew by instinct, however, that it was easier to be diverted from the straight road than to find the way back, and in spite of his challenge and jeers I held on:

"We working people began to suspect this a while ago and to try another plan for bringing about the change. The men who followed one trade, we'll say engineering, said, 'Let us all unite in one body and we'll be so strong that we'll can lay our own terms on the masters." And the engineers, at least a great many of them, did band themselves together, paid in subscriptions, appointed agents, and when the men at one centre had a dispute with their employer their mates all over the country supported them. The same thing was done in other trades. Each trade had its Union. And again I admit that these Unions may have helped the working-people, at least for a time. An employer may have been less ready to quarrel with his men when he knew that he would really have to fight the whole trade. But we see pretty clearly now that trade-unionism is done." ("Ye're a liar. It's stronger than ever it was.") "For one thing" ("What pay d'ye get for this?")—"for one thing" ("For one thing, you're a damned blether ")-" for one thing, the class of workers that I consider most important, that is, the ploughmen and country labourers generally, have no Union." ("That's far ye're wrang; they have ane in Aberdeen.") "For another thing, the masters have copied the men and have formed Masters' Unions, and now when the men at one centre have a dispute it's not their own employer, it's all the employers in the same line they have to face. And as the masters have a thousand pounds for every ten pounds that's in the Trade Union funds, and for every day that the men could hold out could afford to hold out a month, it's clear that the men are beaten before they begin to fight."

Some of my hearers expressed dissent pretty emphatically. I did not attend to them, however. I had something else to occupy me. My friend, the cheap-jack, who had been stand-

ing on the outside of the ring for some minutes, came round below the Steeple and took his place almost at my side. I concluded he wished his turn, and I told him I would stop whenever he liked. He made me an impatient gesture to go on, and I found he had merely shifted his ground in order to watch over his portmanteau, which some youngsters had

evinced a desire to explore.

"We working-people," I continued, "have again seen this, and within the last few years we have started another plan. We have said to ourselves, 'The way to get the laws altered would be to send up to Parliament men of our own class and make them promise to bring about the great change.' And so there has come into existence a third political party, distinct from Liberals and Conservatives, the Labour party. The members of this party are nearly half a hundred in Parliament, they have mostly been workmen themselves at some time in their life, and they do profess to have the aim we all have, namely, to put the land and the wealth of the country in the people's hands. And again I admit that they may have done something, by pushing on the Liberals and the Conservatives, to relieve working-people. For instance, some changes, I don't know what, have been made with regard to compensation for accidents since they appeared in the House of Commons. But is it likely that the great change which we want, and which they profess to want, will ever be brought about by their means? There are one or two things I want to say about this.

"In the first place, what do we know about these men?

Here is a Labour candidate who comes forward——"

At this point the old jobbing-gardener, whom I had lost sight of, did come forward, attracted perhaps by my words and the wave of the hand that accompanied them. He was certainly no soberer than he had been the first time. His entrance, made so pat, was greeted with a great roar. He staggered forward, holding out his hand, but as he came in front of me his attention was taken by the cheap-jack at my side. Suddenly he stopped. Keeping his eye fixed on the man and pointing to the brown portmanteau, he asked with all solemnity, "I say, Hawkie, d-d-do you sell Pears' soap?" Uproarious merriment; then the old fellow was again laid hold of and drawn into the crowd, in spite of the oft-repeated plea that he was "just askin' a question." When the audience

was composed enough to listen, and that was not for some

minutes, I tried again:

"I was asking, what do we know about these Labour members? A Labour candidate comes forward, we'll say. for this constituency: what do we know about him? We have been told that he was once a working-man, a railwayman, perhaps; but do we know him personally? Most of us never saw him before. How can we tell if he is a truthful. sincere man, or is only using us to advance himself? It is difficult to tell that even of people that we have lived among for years; how can we tell it of a man we know nothing about, except that he can make a fine speech? You may reply that it's the same with the Liberal and Conservative candidates; we don't, as a rule, know any more about them and can't tell, therefore, whether they are genuine or not. Very true. You may go further and say it would be the same with anybody who came forward to ask our vote; he couldn't be thoroughly known to, say, five thousand voters. True again. And the lesson from that would seem to be that we can never be sure of anybody who wants us to send him to Parliament as our representative, and that it's not by Parliament, it's not by what we call representative government at all, that we'll ever get what we want." ("What way have we a vote, then?" "Awa' and brush yer boots!" and laughter.)

"And here is strong support for the doubts we may entertain about those Labour members. The Labour party is divided into a lot of sections, S.D.F., I.L.P., S.L.P., and so on half through the alphabet, and you have the members of one section blackguarding the members of all the rest, and even the members of the same section blackguarding one another. Well, they ought to know each other fairly well, better than we can know them, and if they make each other out to be rogues and liars and traitors, what are we, who don't

know them, to think?"

"What did the Prime Minister say about the Labour members?" asked a smartly dressed youth, a clerk perhaps.

"Didn't he say they were a credit to the House?"

"He won't answer you; he knows better," the young tradesman said in a spiteful tone, and he gave a laugh of mingled contempt and vexation when I justified his prediction.

"But there is something more," I resumed. "These

Labour members say, 'Once we are in a majority in Parliament, we'll arrange everything for the good of you workers; we'll organise you and direct you and rule you properly.' But why any organisers or directors or rulers? If we have land and freedom to work it, we can raise our own food, we can build workshops, make tools, turn out everything that's needed to keep us alive and in comfort. We can work together, helping each other when there's occasion. Why get rid of our present rulers only to put a new set in their place? Why have rulers at all?'

The young tradesman, glancing round the throng, asked, "How could we do with no rulers?" and added in a tone of despair, "Did you ever hear such rubbish?" A stout and fiery-faced man, a lorryman, as I found later, turned on him with, "We see plenty o' rubbish onyway when we see you;" and the laugh that followed showed that the prevailing sym-

pathy was not with my critic.

"It seems, then," I proceeded, "that, if we're ever to have the chance of living as free men and women, it won't be from any political party that we'll get it, whether it calls itself the Liberal, the Conservative or the Labour party." ("What other party is there?" asked the young clerk.) "It won't be from parties or governments of any sort. So long as we have other people governing us, how can we call ourselves free? Is there no way, then, of getting what we want, namely, the land, with all that's in it and on it, for the people? Yes, there is. Indeed, I would never have spoken to-night unless I had that to tell you. It's no use telling you merely that things are wrong; you knew that already, you knew it as well as I did. But I can tell you the way to have things put right, the sure way, the only way. However, I'm not going to tell you to-night. I've spoken long enough and have told you plenty for one night. Think over what I've said. that all the ways we've tried up till now are hopeless. Next Saturday night about the same time, if this stance is unoccupied and if the weather will let us stand out, I'll show you the sure and only way we can be free."

The moment my speech was done I turned away, for I felt that discussion would spoil any effect it might have had. Kenneth was following me, but, ere his deliberate pace brought him alongside, a tall, business-like man, fairly well-dressed,

hailed me with,

"Where do you come from? I didn't expect to hear anything like that on Craigkenneth streets. Who are you, anyway?"

I told him and, as we sauntered up Guild Street with frequent halts when the talk grew interesting, he informed me he was a Socialist: his experiences had made him one.

"For many a year," he said, "I didn't concern myself about questions of rich and poor; I was too comfortable. Ever since I left school I had been in Watson Brothers, the big rubber people in Edinburgh; I was a clerk first and at last was head-cashier. The firm failed after I had been there for seventeen years. It was a slack time, and I went about idle for ten months. I had a wife and young family, and though we had saved something it wasn't a great deal, and we got pretty well through it. Then I got in with Laird, the printer; a clerk there, too, then cashier. I wasn't his cashier a year when he went out of business quite suddenly; he was getting old, and was a whimsical fellow anyway. There were all the hands thrown on the street, myself among them. That's over five years ago, and I've never been in a place I could depend on since. I came through here to a crib last May, but I never know at the beginning of a week whether I may not get the road at the end of it. It was the knocking about I got that made me think; I began to ask myself, How is it that men who are fit and willing to work can be thrown out in a moment and may be idle for months? Is there not something wrong in the whole system? Then I got into touch with other fellows that had suffered very much in the same way, and from hearing their talk and thinking over things myself I came to the conclusion that our present system is rotten, and that the only cure is Socialism."

Several of my hearers had followed me up, and one young fellow, flushed-looking and smelling pretty heavily of whisky,

put the question to me,

"D'ye not think that trade would improve if we had Protection?"

Ere I could answer, the ex-cashier said impatiently,

"Man, I wonder at you! Protection or no Protection, what does that matter? It's not worth mentioning. It's just a red herring drawn across the track to take you off the scent. Nothing would delight the Liberals and the Tories more than to have us fighting over Tariffs or Free Trade.

That takes us away from the real question, as our friend here calls it: How are we to recover the land and the wealth of

the country?"

Others stopped me that night to ask my opinions or tell their own grievances. One, I remember, a tall, pale-faced youth, was a draper's shopman. In one shop he had to serve from eight in the morning to eight on ordinary nights and ten on Saturday. "Upon my soul," he assured me, "I had just the feeling that life wasn't worth living. I didn't care how soon I might be blotted out." His wage had been a guinea a week. In his present shop the hours were from eight to seven, and though his wage was only a pound he was more content. He ended by declaring that there would need to be a change, else we would see a general burst-up.

As we walked home under a thick sky that showed none of his loved stars, Kenneth delivered himself regarding my

speech. He admitted I had spoken the truth.

"But it's no worth while botherin', Jamie," he went on. "Even though the human race could be improved, they'll a' perish some day, and what's the use o' improvin' them? Accordin' to science, the sun's lossin' its heat, and by-and-by it'll no gie enough heat to sustain life on oor planet; syne everything 'll perish, man wi' the rest."

"That'll be a long time yet, Kenneth," I laughed; "not

in your day or mine.'

"No, Jamie; but the end may come suner in anither way. If some o' the heavenly bodies should happen to come ower near the sun and be drawn in, the sun's heat would rise to such a pitch that oor globe would melt like butter; in fact, it would become a ball o' gas as it used to be."

"So you think, Kenneth, we should just be like those geese?" and I looked up as an excited cackling in the thick air intimated that a long column was migrating south.

"Ay, Jamie; a body should follow his nature and no

bother aboot ither folk."

I did not argue with him; I had done enough in that way already. Though I might have told him that I must have been following my nature, so content, so satisfied did I feel. If the talking had done no good to my hearers, it had done much to myself. I was already looking forward to my next appearance. But things were to happen ere I spoke again at the Steeple.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

HERE was a good deal of wet weather the next week, and the Saturday was rainy and grey. For the first time that season the air had the unmistakable feel of snow, and I knew that if the northern peaks had been visible they would be seen to have on their winter cap. Kenneth spent the forenoon in my hut, and on leaving at dinner-time he asked when we should go in to the town.

"It'll hardly be worth while going at all," I said, "unless

it fairs—hardly worth while for me, at any rate."

"No, Jamie. The folk couldna stand oot in weather like

this."

We finally arranged that if I decided on going I should call for him before seven and we should take the train. The Well station was three-quarters of a mile from the village, at least from the part of the village where my friend stayed, and rather than go so far out of our way we preferred walking to

town, the more as the train service was poor.

As darkness closed in, the storm grew wilder. Luckily I had laid in a plentiful store of coal, and, in spite of the wind which entered by every chink, I had my little hut as warm as an oven. Gazing into the ruddy depths of the stove I saw the faces of the dear ones of my old life; I looked at them with no melancholy, though it was strange to think of us so near and yet parted by a gulf deeper and wider than the ocean. Then my fancies wandered, and I made up a verse or two of a piece I meant to call Pat, for in the last few weeks, with my mind at peace, with leisure and energy left me by enforced idleness, I had been trying to bring my hand in at the long-neglected craft. So comfortable was I that I felt I might be more comfortable still, and seven o'clock, the hour agreed on with Kenneth, found me snugly settled in

bed, and, by the soft light of my little lamp that stood on the trunk beside me, reading for the hundredth time some marked passages in *The Bothie*. Even when I laid the book aside I kept the lamp burning; the light and warmth of my tiny shelter were enjoyed the more by contrast with the storm and dark without. Then the thought of wretched ones homeless

on such a night broke the selfish dream.

The storm raged for many hours, and twice I was wakened by the elm-boughs pounding on the roof. Then, I suppose, it had calmed, for when I next opened my eyes I could see daylight through the crevices of the walls. There was no sound of wind or rain, yet I again had the feeling that something had disturbed me. Perhaps the door was not closely drawn and had been moved by a passing breeze? No. Ere a minute had gone the sound that had wakened me was repeated; there was no mistaking it now: somebody was rapping. I rose, unfastened the door and looked out.

Was I dreaming? There stood a little girl, bareheaded, her eyes smiling into mine. The smile was not for my attire—I was only in my nightshirt—it was the smile of old acquaintance. She was bareheaded, as I have said, her thick, dark-brown hair gathered off her brow with a black velvet riband. Her cheeks were round and fresh, her dewy hazel eyes had the soft yet roguish glance I have seen once or twice in the eyes of childhood. Her years would be about ten. One could not well picture a more winsome face, yet it was something else than the beauty that arrested me: it was the likeness I saw, or fancied I saw, to a face that was often with me in my dreams. Indeed, the question came, Can this be some little friend of Nina? and I might have been alarmed but for the reassuring smile.

The speed of thought! All this had had time to flit through my fancy, and yet we had not stood two seconds looking into

each other's eyes.

"Well, dearie, who are you?" I asked.

"Please, I'm Elsie Graham," she said, speaking very purely, and, ere I could associate the name with anyone I knew, she added, "next door to old Mrs. Somers."

"Oh yes," I said, and waited for the message.

"And please, Mr. Bryce," the little maiden went on, "it was Mrs. Somers sent me up for you. She would like you to come down as soon as you can."

"Oh! Well, I'll be down directly. There's nothing wrong, is there? Maybe you don't know, Elsie?"

"She didn't say anything to my mother, but my mother

thinks that it's Kenneth that's not home yet."

"Oh!" I said again, and this time it was almost a groan. "Well, love, I'll be down at once, nearly as soon as you. Tell her that, dear, and thank you very much for coming to let me know."

The little messenger gave me another of her shy, roguish

smiles, and the next moment she was scampering away.

There was not a person stirring in the village street; indeed, it was still early, not seven o'clock, and daylight was barely full. The outer door of Kenneth's cottage was open, and, as I went in, the old woman came forward from the kitchen. To a stranger her face would not have betrayed her trouble; she had been schooled to endure all things.

"Little Elsie came up for me," I began.

"Yes, Jims," so she always named me; "I wanted to see ye. Kenneth's never hame and I'm gey and anxious, for you're no there to look efter him. And I kent ye wadna coont it a trouble to dae what ye could to help me."
"I'll go off at once," I assured her; but the table was

already set, and she insisted that I should drink a cup of tea.

"I suppose," I said, as I sat down, "my best plan will be to borrow a bicycle-some of your neighbours will have

"The Scott lads have ane, I'm maist sure; but Elsie 'll ken-that bairn kens everything-and she'll let ye see their

hoose."

"Yes. I'll be no time of running in to Craigkenneth, if I need to go the whole way. Of course, I may meet him on the road."

"I've been thinking, Jims, it micht be safer to rin doon to Cowbrough's first. Ye ken Kenneth sorts his powny every mornin', and it's just possible he may hae gaen doon there. Though I someway think ye'll get him aboot the Miller's Loan; ye ken it, Jims?"

"Quite well." It was a farm-lane that left the highway a good mile out. "But why do you think he'll be there, Mrs.

Somers?"

"That's whaur he was the last time I gaed oot to look for him. That'll be twa year sin'. Elsie's faither was livin' then, and he gaed wi' me. It was three in the mornin' when we set oot, and we fund him a wee bit doon the Loan. We didna gang near him, for Kenneth's gey stubborn when he's that way, and he doesna like me to tak' notice o' him. So we just waited on till he rase o' himsel', and syne we keepit walkin' on in front and restin' when he rested, and he was hame at the back o' five. Sae I someway think ye'll find him aboot the same place. He was sittin' in the munelicht on the left-haun bank, mebbe twenty yairds doon, just this way;" and she turned her eyes to the floor and put her hands on her knees.

"But-" I began in wonder; then stopped myself and

asked, "Was that two years ago?"

"Ay, Jims; twa year past in June; it was the hinmost Saturday o' June, or rather the Sunday mornin'. I doot the lang wait did me nae guid, for I've never been able to gang twice through the kitchen sin' syne without sittin' doon to rest."

I had been about to blunder out the question, How could she see him when she had been blind for five years? But I

had soon understood; a mother can see without eyes.

"Well," I said, rising, and I tried my hardest to keep my voice steady, "there's no need for you to go when you have somebody to go for you. And I think he'll come along with me all right."

"I think he will, Jims; that's the way I was sae anxious you should gang. For I've nae doot Mrs. Graham wad hae

gaen if I had asked her."

My little friend Elsie guided me to the house where I was to get the bicycle, and I set off at once. Cowbrough's house, a new villa with offices behind, was at the Craigkenneth end of the place and a little way off the main road. Though I turned in at the gate, I had little hope of finding Kenneth, for the old woman's presentiment had impressed me. Her instinct was out, however, for once. As I passed behind Cowbrough's house I came on Kenneth lying close to the back gate. I could not have told the colour of his clothes for mud, his cap was gone, and when I shook him up I noticed that his mouth was dirty and red with blood. He knew and named me, and at once began raving about "that auld ——," whom he threatened with the most fearsome vengeance. It was the first time I had seen Kenneth drunk, and, though aware that

drink changes some men's nature, I shuddered at his awful curses. He came away with me, however, almost at once, and after the first few steps, which certainly described a rather circuitous course, he walked with amazing steadiness, only stopping every little while to execrate his absent foe. We were nearly at the high-road when a loud "Hey!" made us There was the gross figure of the old fruit-grower following us up and advancing on us swiftly, lame leg and all. Placing himself in front of Kenneth and shaking the stick which he pointed at him, he demanded,

"Have ye sorted my pony?"

Kenneth's ravings had given me to suspect that there had been an encounter between the two already, and from the stories of others I learned what had happened. Hearing someone staggering about the place earlier in the morning, Cowbrough had come out and run into Kenneth, who assailed him with frightful curses, discharging on him the venom that had been accumulating in his heart for years. Cowbrough replied by ramming the dirty end of his stick into Kenneth's mouth.

Now that his old tyrant was confronting him once more, Kenneth's valour began to ooze away, though enough was left to enable him to reply in a sullen tone,

"No, I havena sorted yer powny."
"Will ye go back and sort my pony?" the old fellow demanded, his face set, his voice as hard as steel.

Kenneth stood, giving him a furtive glance but making

no answer.

Thinking to compose the row, I said, "I'll come back and sort it as soon as I see him home."

As though he had not heard me speak or even known my

presence, Cowbrough repeated,

"Will ye sort my pony, ye drunken blackguard?"

"I'll go and sort it," I said; and I had taken a step or two back when the old man lifted his stick and drew Kenneth two wild strokes on the arm.

" Jamie!" Kenneth called; but he made no attempt to defend himself, so completely was he dominated by his old

tryant. I was back ere he could get a third stroke.

"Stand out of that," Cowbrough ordered, his eyes ablaze, broad face livid. "Stand out of that, I tell ye, or I'll his broad face livid. let you have the same."

At the sight of Kenneth, a grown man and my friend, being beaten like a dog by this old villain, a passion of pity and wrath came over me; yet this will hardly account for the storm of rage that now swept me away. The truth must have been that with me too it had been gathering for a while.

"You'll what?" I asked in a low concentrated tone.

"Down with that stick, you ---, or I'll fell you."

Wild as was the old man's passion, it yielded to mine; the stick was lowered, and it was in another tone, a tone of expostulation, that he said,

'I'm asking nothing but my rights. If I pay a man, I've

a right to have my work done."

I did not speak; I merely pointed to the house, and Cowbrough, after a very brief hesitation, hirpled away, with a mumbled threat about making somebody "pay for this."

The scene, or perhaps the blows, had made Kenneth a soberer man; he came with me readily, nor did he speak a word the whole way. For once the old woman's blindness was a blessing, though I found myself wondering whether the mother's instinct might not again replace the lost sense and let her see her son as he looked now. She understood at least that I had him in control, and afraid no doubt of wakening his stubbornness she let me take him into the little room, help him off with his clothes and into bed. On his right arm, below the elbow, were two big red lumps.

The bicycle had been left at Cowbrough's; indeed, I had meant, even before our rough encounter, to go back as soon as I could and attend to Kenneth's duties. As I reached the back-gate, the old fellow, who had come out of the stable,

called to me,

"Where are ye going?"

His face had not fully recovered its sanguine hue, and the expression was sharp and stern.

"I'm going to look after the pony," I said indifferently. "You're no longer in my employment;" and with his staff he gave me the gesture of dismissal I had given him not half an hour before. The passion, that had somewhat ebbed, surged in my brain once more; I laid my hand on the gate to tear it open and spring on him. He understood, and, though he held his staff ready, there was fear in his eyes. That, and the moment's delay in opening the gate, gave reason her

chance. I stood for some seconds eyeing the old man silently,

then took the bicycle and rode away.

Once back at the strawberry-field I sauntered up to the knoll to which I often resorted for the sake of the view. The day was not sunny; indeed, the sky was grey overhead, and on the peaks of the northern mountains white clouds were down. But the landscape was exceedingly clear, clearer than it often is in sunshine, and cottages and farms could be counted right to the mountains. The air was very still, for even in the country a special quietness comes with the sabbath. The beauty and calm of Nature contrasted strangely with the wild scene of violence I had lately witnessed, and once again—how often have I had occasion for the like!—I found myself murmuring,

"And all save the spirit of man is divine."

Not that I exempted myself from the judgment passed upon my kind. I felt shame enough at the part I had played. Just like my old tyrant, I had yielded to brief madness, I who taught others how to live and who preached that life was love!

## CHAPTER XXXVII

HEN Kenneth came up next morning I told him he would need to start the delving alone: Cowbrough had sacked me.

"He's dune the same to me, Jamie, mair than ance, but I aye started as if naething had happened and he

never said a word."

"I don't know that it would be quite the same in this case," I said. "At any rate, he and I had better be parted;" and though my friend, who looked very downcast, pled with me to accompany him, I kept to my resolve. This was what I had planned. I should look for a room in Craigkenneth; my things could be sent on by the carrier in the afternoon,

and I should call for them at the carrier's quarters.

It was in the Wynds that I meant to settle. Many of the properties, I found, were factored by a joiner near by. I repaired to his yard and found a journeyman and a prentice leisurely breaking up boxes and bunching the chips for kindling stuff. The prentice took a handful of keys and set out as my guide. The new task must have been more to his mind than the one he had left, for he insisted on taking me round all the vacancies, and we spent the whole forenoon house-hunting. Most of the places were in or near the Walk, that straight broad street running up to the castle. The front buildings of the Walk are fairly uniform, dating mostly from the first half of the seventeenth century; a few survivals from a much earlier day lie at the back, and one or two of these were on our list. The first was in a court, to which we gained access by an old arch on the Walk. On three sides the court was shut in by high blind walls; the house filled the north side. It was of three stories, with crow-stepped gables, and had three dormer windows finished with fleur-delis. One of the dormer rooms was to let. The walls were oak-panelled, the wood-work being much decayed except on

one side, the left-hand side as you faced the window. Here a centre-panel, much wider than the rest, was painted, and though the work had been done many centuries ago the colours were still vivid. This was the subject. A young lady bare-headed and in the ruff, pointed waist and swelling hoops of Mary's time, was confronting three court-gallants and holding out in her right hand something for their inspection. What the something was could not be seen, for at the spot the distemper had peeled off or perhaps had been deliberately removed. Something revolting it must have been; for two of the gallants were gazing on it in fascinated horror, the third has raised his wild eyes from it to the lady's face, while she meets his look with a glance of triumphant malice. has appeared from an earlier episode, pictures have sometimes a weird effect on me, and I soon felt that I could not live in view of this one, the more as I had divined in an instant (whether rightly or wrongly) what the shocking something was. On my communicating my impression to the youthful joiner, he promptly suggested,

"Ah weel! let's try the Lang Close."

This is a noted lane of the Old Town. Its name is a shibboleth. When a Craigkenneth native, far from home, forgathers with a stranger who claims the same birthplace, he tests him with the question, "D'ye ken the Lang Close?" You enter it from the Walk by a long "pend"—a tunnel, it might best be called—the roof being the floor of the front buildings. Once through the tunnel, you have a narrow strip of open sky overhead, a cobbled passage beneath your feet, a high wall on the left hand, and on the right a row of low rude hovels. Open your arms and you can touch the wall with one hand and the house-fronts with the other. I told my guide that he need not show me any houses here; I required more air than the Land Close could afford. For the sake of seeing it all, we walked on to the far end, where you emerge by another "pend" on to the Lady Wynd.

Another old dwelling we explored. It stands at one end of the Walk, and does not need the name "Lord Livingstone's Lodging" to prove that it must have belonged to an important family. It is the loftiest building in the Old Town, having windows on six stages; its entrance is an imposing doorway approached by broad steps and surmounted by heraldic devices. On the third landing was a vacant

room. Its most striking feature was a chimney-piece of elaborately carved oak. The fireplace, however, had been partly built up and furnished with a modern grate. The chimney-piece, with its broad lintel and lofty jambs, was ludicrously out of keeping with the size of the room; it was not even in the centre of the wall, but was close up to one side. Soon I learned the secret. The apartment had once been spacious, but had been divided up by partitions to accommodate several tenants. The window looked on to the Walk, and altogether the place was the most inviting I had yet visited. I was ready to take it at once, and I only accompanied my prentice-friend to the remaining houses because I saw he wished to draw out the task over the whole forenoon. The one difficulty was that the room was too dirty for immediate occupancy; however, the factor, who was in his workshop when we returned, undertook to see it tidied up by a charwoman and have it ready for me by the next day. The delay was not serious; I resolved to spend the night at the Temperance Hotel, where I had put up before.

It was now past noon, and I went into a cook-shop in Guild Street to have some dinner. While waiting to be served, I was looking idly at the houses opposite. Suddenly a notice displayed from one of the windows fixed my attention and gave me an idea. It ran, "Lodgings for workmen and Travellers."

"What sort of a lodging-house is that?" I inquired of the

woman who brought my meal.

She shook her head and said she could not say much in its favour; but if I wanted a bed for the night, she could recommend Cannon's lodging-house in the Vennal. I noted the name in my memory and resolved to try the place. I was in working garb and should have needed to change if I asked admittance to a respectable hotel. The afternoon and evening I spent wandering about the old part of the town, where I often encountered acquaintances from the strawberry-field. By nine o'clock I was tired enough to feel the charm of rest, even under a humble roof, and I made for the Vennal, a short narrow street connecting Guild Street with the Walk. Near the lower end was a travellers' notice above the door of a very old dingy building.

" Is that Cannon's lodging-house?" I asked of an old man

who was standing with another much younger.

"Ay," he answered, "and this is Mr. Cannon."

The younger man, who was well dressed and smart looking, greeted me civilly, and ere I could tell my business said,

"You'll be wanting a bed?"

I said I was.

"I think we'll manage to accommodate you. Just go up

the stair there. You'll find a man to look after you."

I entered the building as he directed. In this strange world we never can say where the next step may land us. It was an unlikely place for such a thing, and certainly nothing of the kind was in my thoughts; yet I was to make a discovery that would lighten a dark passage of my early days.

On the first landing of the turret-stair were two doors. Both were shut. Behind the leftmost I could hear voices. I knocked at it, and a voice called "Come in." Opening the door by a latch I found myself looking into a large apartment that seemed part-kitchen, for it held a modern close-range laden with pots and kettles, but part-bedroom as well, for two fixed-in beds took up the whole of one side. Standing before the fire were three persons, a man and two women. The man came forward to meet me. He was a hunchback dwarf, with no neck, but with his head stuck very upright on his shoulders. His face was cheerful and kindly, and he welcomed me like an old friend.

"Come along," he said; "how have you been living?"

I assured him I was all right, and as the women moved to make room for me I went forward. Of the women, who were both bareheaded and seemed at home, the one had nothing striking in her appearance—indeed, I can recall nothing about her looks except that she was neither young nor old; the other, who might be forty, was plump, comely, and very tidily put on. There had been a frank and somewhat expectant smile on her fresh face from the moment she set eyes on me, and she now moved aside to give me her place, and invited me to come near the fire as the night was cold. It needed neither the words nor the movement, her glance was enough, to tell that I had found favour in her eyes.

I was not well settled at the fire when the little man asked, "Where's your pal?" and added, ere I could speak, "the fiddler that was with you last time?"

I looked down at him sharply, suspicious that he was chaffing; but the women, speaking at once, cried out, "No, no," and went on to say that I wasn't the fiddler's pal.

My little friend surveyed me closely.

"Neither he is," he said at last. "You'll excuse me. I did take you for him. You see," he explained, "we had two chaps here a fortnight since; one of them was a fiddler,

and I took you for his pal. Isn't he like him?"

One of the women admitted there was a bit likeness; her neighbour, my comely friend, shook her head smilingly and declared this was a different looking lad altogether. placed a chair for me in front of the fire.

"You'll be tired," she said, "if you've been on the road." The little chap was anxious to set himself right with me. "You'll excuse me," he said; "it was quite a mistake."

I reassured him and explained that I had never been in the place before, but had been directed to it, and that the boss, whom I had met on the street, had told me I was sure of a bed.

"You'll get that. Would you like one to yourself or-

"He'll never be so selfish," interrupted my lady-friend with a laugh, in which the others joined.

"It's fourpence for a bed to yourself and twopence ha'-

penny if you go halves," the little fellow went on.

I would muster the fourpence, I told him.

"And I'm no to have a chance?" the lady asked with mock-reproach.

I said with a smile that I should need room to sprawl in.

"Ay; he's tired, poor lad!" she said in a feeling tone to her companion, and her hand, with quite a motherly touch, patted my shoulder.

"You'd maybe like to go to your bed now?" the little

fellow suggested, and I assented.

It was not that I was fatigued; only I felt I should be safer once I was away from my fair friend, good-hearted as I saw her to be. She gave me a kindly look and wished me a good

night's sleep, as I followed my guide from the room.

The little man had lit a candle, and it was needed. We twisted round the turnpike-stair to the next landing, climbed on to the flat above, then walked through along passage with windows on the right hand looking down, no doubt, to the street, and on the left several doors that would open, I suppose, on sleeping-rooms. At the far end my guide stopped and, telling me that this was my place, let me into a big square low-roofed room, camceiled on two sides and with no window but a small skylight. It contained three beds, the largest

running across from the door, the two smaller at right angles and separated from one another by a long bench. The room was but dimly lighted with the candle, for a small hand-lamp that was nailed, as I afterwards found, to the wall on the right was screwed so low as only to give a tiny spark; so when my friend indicated the narrowest bed as mine and turning down the clothes assured me that I should find it all right, I could not put the matter to the proof. But testimonyto the truth of my friend's assurance was forthcoming from an unexpected quarters; there was a movement in the adjoining bed and a voice declared,

"Ay, that he will; he'll find everything clean and dacent;

no a beast aboot. Na, na."

When the figure raised itself a little, I made it out to be that of a grey-haired man, of whose appearance I could only tell that he had bits of side-whisker and a very prominent nose. He had spoken in a strong voice and a deliberate and somewhat consequential tone.

"That'll be fourpence, then," said my guide, who seemed

about to retire.

"Do I pay just now?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, rather apologetically; "I've to

account for it every night to the boss."

"Ou ay," the old man again corroborated; "it's the rule o' the hoose. Ay, I've never seen onything but what's dacent

aboot Humphie. Na, na."

The little man received his fourpence, and with a civil good-night left the room, taking the candle with him. When I tried to turn up the lamp and obtain more light, my neighbour assured me it wouldn't screw, and he was correct. The handle was left stiff, he supposed, on purpose to "hain the ile." Almost below the lamp stood a big zinc pail, and, while I was undressing, the old gentleman rose and gave a practical demonstration of its use. He also indicated the bench at the bedside as a handy receptacle for my clothes. I took off everything but my semmit, and it was well I did, for ere I was half an hour in bed I had reason to suspect that the old man's praises of its cleanliness were exaggerated. It was not long till I found that my neighbour was both talkative and curious.

"Ha'e ye travelled faur the day?" he asked, before I was

well down.

No; I had only come from the Well.

"Ye're an eddicated lad, I can hear," was his next remark.

I modestly disclaimed the possession of much learning.

"Mebbe ye're a gey lad for a bucket?" he suggested, and added, "like mysel'."

I again said No; I wasn't a great drinker.

"I'm an awfu' —— for my lush," he confessed. "I've drunk a sovereign since Friday. Ay, it was just on Friday that I got the sovereign frae Admiral Seton, and I've naething but some coppers left."

The admiral's name in such a mouth was a surprise. Sud-

denly grown curious in my turn, I asked,

"You know Admiral Seton, then?"

"Ou ay. It's no yesterday that I ken him."

He would, no doubt, have told me more, for he seemed communicative enough about his own affairs, but he had got out his pipe and was trying to have a smoke. The pipe was not drawing, and this diverted him from the first topic. He had not been much about Lowis in my time; this I could tell, not from his face, for in the bad light I saw him very imperfectly, but from his talk. I am somewhat sharp at placing dialects, and ere the old man had spoken half a dozen words that night I knew he was far from his calf-country, and that his country was Strathmore.

"You don't belong to this countryside," I said, when my

ear informed me that the pipe was going.

"Na; I'm frae the north; I belang to Meigle. Ye'll ken Meigle?"

I had been near it—at Coupar-Angus, I told him.

"Coupar-Angus! Man, I had a brither had a fine licensed shop in Coupar-Angus. He married the weedow. But he gaed through 't in nae time. He was an awfu' lad for the booze—like mysel'."

He took a few draws in silence, then continued,

"Ay, he met wi' a queer death. He had been drinkin' ae nicht, and his cronies brocht him hame and just opened the door and shoved him in. And when his wife rase in the mornin', she fund him lyin' there deid. Ay; Smart, the biscuitbaker, was ane o' them. Smart never liket to hear o' that."

"But you didn't go in to the licensed trade?" I queried.

"No; I'm a coachman to trade, when I had ony trade; for noo I'm an auld silly —— that can dae naething but drink. But I've been aboot guid hooses in my day; I was undercoachman a while wi' Lord Airlie."

"And you would be about Lowis at one time?" I suggested.

"Ay, I was a groom there for a twalmonth when I was a young fallow. That's lang syne noo. The auld laird was leevin' then, and this laird was a young swankie like mysel'. I kent him fine then, for he was hame three month frae his boat."

"So you came south to see him for old acquaintance sake?"

"No a'thegither. It was this way, ye see. I gang trampin' aboot up north yonder roond a' the kintraside, and I meet in wi' a' sorts of bodies, and one leddy says to me ae day, 'What way d'ye no go into an auld man's Home? There's one near Craigkenneth, a very comfortable one, I understaun'.' Weel, I kent there was, for it was to the fore when I was at Lowis. It's oot at Kippleross; I used to drive by it often. A laird left his hoose to be a hame for auld folk, and he left his laun and siller for its upkeep. Sae as the winter was comin' on, it cam' into my heid that I micht dae waur nor tak' the leddy's advice. Sae I just made my way doon bit by bit—I've been three weeks on the road—and I landed here last Wednesday."

"And is the admiral going to get you in?"

"Aweel, ye see, it was this way. I ken a doctor here, Dr. Wilkie-ye'll no likely ken him; his faither was a doctor up by at Meigle. I've driven the faither mony a time when he was oot o' a man. Weel, I ca's on Dr. Nigel and tells him what I'm efter, and I said I kent there was such a place when I was at Lowis Hoose. So he says I should ca' on the admiral, for his word wad gang a lang way. I never kent till then he was an admiral."

"And is he going to get you in?" I repeated, for the old fellow seemed lapsing into another smoking fit.

"Aweel, I gangs oot to the auld place-it's a grand place noo to what it was in my time-and they said the admiral was at hame, sure enough, and he comes oot to the back coort whaur I was staunin', and I tells him whae I am and what I wanted-of course, he wadna mind me at first ony mair than I wad ha' kent him; forty 'ear maks an odds on a body. But he tells me he taks naething to dae wi' the Hame and he could help me in no way. Hooever, he gied me a sovereign; it was aye something."

"Did he remember you?"

"He never said whether he did or no, tho' I minded him o' him bein' hame when I was servin' there. But I've little doot he minded me. I've been thinkin' that he mebbe wadna care to hae thae days brocht back."

" No?"

"Na. He was a steerin' chiel in that days, fair daft on the hizzies, mebbe wi' him bein' on the watter and no seein' ony. In fac', he near got into a bad mess, though there's no mony ken aboot it but mysel'."

"Indeed?"

"Ay," pursued the old man; "it was this way. There was a lass at the Big Hoose, a table-maid, a gey weel-faured hizzie, Ann Dobbie was the name. I had a bit wark wi' her mysel', though I had heard she was spoken for; a chiel aboot Shirgarvie was to mairry her, a forester."

I could scarcely keep back an exclamation; it seemed to me that I knew already the revelation that was to come. I was about to suggest the forester's name, but I thought the

old man would come on it in his rambling story.

"However," he continued, "doesn't Ann and the young laird start cairryin' on thegither? They were gey sly about it, and I micht never ha' been a bit the wiser if I hadna come on them ae nicht up the burnside."

Here the old fellow favoured me with a description of the

scene, which I may pass over.

"I dived into the wood," he went on, "and I don't suppose either o' them wad ever ken wha it was. But I watched them efter that, and I've got them at the same game. Weel, the young laird's no long back to his boat when Ann gets mairret in an awfu' hurry; and I dinna suppose there was a body kent the reason o' the hurry but me and Tam Ferguson, a gardener lad, for it was ower guid a story to keep to mysel' a'thegither. Hooever, it wasna long till a'body kent there was a reason, for Ann hadna been a wife mony month when a bairn maks its appearance, and fine Tam and me kent whase bairn it was.'

"And the fellow she married was a forester at Shirgarvie,

you say?"

"Ay; I kent the name fine, but I canna mind it noo; it's sae lang syne."

"There was a forester about Shirgarvie at one time—indeed, he was head-forester when he died—called Morrison."

"The very name!" cried the old man. "Morrison was the fallow's name. Weel, he rocked the cradle for the young laird's wean."

I could not speak; I was recalling things about the poor Wanderer that had been vaguely strange to me at the time

and were now explained. So lost was I in these memories that I let the old man ramble on without heeding, almost without hearing, him. And when at last I could call in my thoughts, I found he had passed to matters that concerned himself,—when he would start for the north, how he would raise money, and so on. I was tempted to bring him back to the story and ask him questions it suggested; this above all: did the young laird take any interest in his child, and did he know her in later days when he was the laird and the admiral and she a homeless wanderer? But I bethought me that my neighbour was less likely to know this than myself; so I lay silent and pensive, while he told his plans of begging his trainfare from Dr. Nigel and then footing it all the way.

"But ye're tired," he said at last, finding that his talk no longer evoked question or comment, "and I'll just be keepin'

ye waukin' wi' my clavers."

Once or twice afterwards he made a remark on the closeness of the room, the noise downstairs, and similar topics. I gave no answer and he soon stopped. There was certainly a great noise in the lower regions, as if most of the inmates of the establishment were gathered there and engaged in a wild wrangle. Then doors began to slam, some quite close to us, and when it had grown very late—it must have been past midnight—there was a tremendous staggering in the long passage, our door burst open, and first one man, then a second reeled into our dark chamber and clashed on the floor. Soon the little man appeared with a candle. After surveying the new-comers and satisfying himself, apparently, that nothing more could be done with them, he blew out the lamp and retired, leaving the room in total darkness. The pair lay a while without speech or movement; then one began calling for "Humphie" and demanding a match. In a little I could hear him groping in his clothes, and at last he managed to strike a light, and with some searching found the cigarette that had dropped from his mouth when he fell. He was also able to recognise his mate and greeted him with many oaths, to which the other was too drunk to respond. Then he asked and repeated the question every few seconds, "Are ye goin' to yer bed, Jacob?" and when Jacob remained silent or answered only with a short "No," he proceeded to urge the desirableness and even necessity of going. After a time he volunteered to help Jacob off with his boots, and after much

groping and many inquiries for the whereabouts of his sanguinary feet he started to the task. The jogging which this entailed roused Jacob somewhat from his lethargy, the first token of returning life being a request for a smoke. With much fumbling another cigarette was produced and lit and stuck in Tacob's mouth, and the work of undressing went on. Occasionally, as he tugged at boot or trouser-leg, the assistant would lose his grip, the two friends would be parted, would roll on the floor, would even at times, so far as I could judge, turn a back-somersault, with much dim moaning and cursing. When such a catastrophe occurred, Jacob would lie helpless; his friend, once recovered from the shock, would start cruising about in the darkness, demanding "Where are ye, Jacob? I say, Jacob, I say, where are ye?" and announcing his discovery with "Is this you, Jacob? Is this yer-leg?" Boots, trousers, and jacket were gradually peeled off in the order named; and Jacob was then regarded as fit for being put to bed. At this point, however, he turned obstinate and would not move.

"Ye must go to bed, Jacob."

Silence till the twentieth repetition, then a vague "No."

"What'll ye do, Jacob?"

Again silence, again much repetition, and at last Jacob

would intimate his intention to "lie here."

"Ye can't lie there, Jacob; ye must go to bed, Jacob; must go to bed, Jacob;" and after long effort, and more by friendly constraint then argument, he succeeded in depositing the stubborn Jacob on the groaning bed. He had next to attend to his own undressing, a task that was not accomplished without the expenditure of much time, labour, and cursing. To go to bed had taken, as near as I could calculate, a little over two hours. Most of the time, amid all their tugging and tumbling, they had continued the attempt to smoke, lighting matches and cigarettes, letting both fall on the floor, and as often as not leaving them there. In bed they smoked still, dropping the live matches among the clothes and talking unconcernedly about setting the house on fire. How it has escaped till now. for I notice it still survives, is a marvel. The old man next me had been kept awake like myself, and had occasionally relieved his feelings with an "Och, och!" "Eh, sirs!" "Isn't that awfu?" We were not to have peace even when our neighbours had lain down. They had sobered considerably. and they maintained a conversation of a very miscellaneous

sort, from which I made out that they were barrow-men, that is, street-porters who meet commercial travellers at the station and wheel about their samples from shop to shop. Jacob's mate, whose name I never heard, taunted Jacob with meanness, and reverted to the charge at least a score of times. One day he had given Jacob a "wing"; another day, when he was short, he asked Jacob for a "wing," which Jacob refused, though he had been out with a barrow all day and had plenty. Both fellows spoke well and must have received a fair education; Jacob, indeed, referred to himself as having been meant for better things. In his rambling talk he grew wild over some Hooligans who molested him, and he swore he would knife them though he should swing for it. When the pair ceased talking and began to snore, my old neighbour, hearing me move in bed, asked, "Hasn't that been a terrible racket?" and, on my assenting, proceeded to tell me he was feeling "dry" and not well of himself; the drink had upset him, though once on a day it would have put him neither up nor down. He thought he would go down to the kitchen and make some tea; he had tea with him in a "poke." I could hear him getting into some of his clothes; then, with the aid of matches, he found the door. In about half an hour he returned, and in answer to my kindly inquiries assured me the tea had done him good; he mentioned also that it was near four o'clock, and that rain had come on. This last I knew already, for I had heard the drops pattering on our garret-roof. Eluding the old man's attempts to draw me into conversation, I tried my hardest to sleep, and this time I did succeed. When I woke, it was still perfectly dark, but some of the inmates downstairs were stirring, for doors slammed at times and it must have been the noise that broke my sleep. Ere long the two latecomers began to move and exchange an odd word, and no sooner was he sure of a listener than my old neighbour started:

"Eh, lads! but ye was drunk last nicht."

"Were we?" returned a voice that I knew for Jacob's. "Ye was that. Lod! ye was as drunk as I ever kent lads in my life. But naething wrang! Na, na. Ye was interferin' wi' nobody. I've been boozin' gey sair mysel' since Friday. Lod! but I thocht ye wad never get to yer beds last nicht. You was the warst, and yer freen had an awfu' job wi' ye. Is he a' richt this mornin'?"

"Oh yes, I'm right enough!" said Jacob's mate.

"Isn't there another fellow there?" Jacob inquired.

"Ay," said the old man; "but I doot he's sleepin'; he was gey tired last nicht, and you lads wad keep him waukin;" and he gave further particulars of their drunken plight, directing his remarks to Jacob mostly, for the friend of Jacob seldom spoke. During the talk my old neighbour seemed to be rummaging his clothes, and would often strike a match to help him in the search. Suddenly he broke out in tones of consternation.

"What'll I dae for my mornin'? Lod sake? I never kent the like o' this. I've only three bawbees left, and I thocht I had about saxpence. Just three bawbees! That'll no get my mornin' What am I to dae? I canna gang without my mornin'."

His dismay at the prospect of losing the morning dram, which he evidently claimed as a natural right, was so comic that I had a hard struggle to keep down a snigger, and the bed began to shake under me when he inquired at Jacob, "Will you gie me a bawbee for my mornin'?" and when Jacob suddenly went to sleep, "Will ye gie me a bawbee for my mornin?" he repeated, "just a ha'penny to mak' oot my mornin', and I'll gie ye 't back afore nicht." But Jacob must have been in a dead sleep, for he neither spoke nor moved.

"Is he sleepin', you ither lad?" asked the old man, shifting

the direction of his voice.

"I don't know," said Jacob's friend indifferently.

"Can you gie me a bawbee for my mornin'?" the old coachman asked, keeping his voice aimed at the same quarter; "ye'll get it back afore nicht, for I'll be gettin' siller the day."

Then a thing happened that seemed wonderful to me at the moment, and has lost none of its strangeness since. The young fellow searched in his clothes, as I could hear, and even while my neighbour continued to request the ha'penny and to represent that he couldn't do without his "mornin'," the other struck a light and tossed a coin to where the old man's figure could be dimly discerned sitting up in bed.

"Eh! that's kind o' ye; I'll get my mornin' noo," he cried in glee. "What!" he exclaimed the next moment, "a penny! Eh, man! that's guid o' ye. I never thocht I wad ha' got a penny. But I'll pay ye back, for I've to ca' on a gentleman the day that's sure to gie me something, and I'll pay ye back as sure 's I get it. I'll no say I'll gie ye the penny, but I'll gie ye drink. Whaur will I see ye? Will I see ye aboot the station?"

"I don't know."

"What's yer name?"

"You ask too many questions," said the young fellow curtly. "Ah, weel," said the old man somewhat abashed, but he

"Ah, weel," said the old man somewhat abashed, but he soon recovered himself and assured his benefactor that he

would give him it anyway when he came across him.

Then he repeated the story I had been favoured with the night before of his vain endeavour to gain admittance to the Home at Kippleross. Jacob's mate assured him the Home was a rare place: they gave you beer. Hereupon Jacob himself, awaking as suddenly as he had gone to sleep, entered into the talk, and warned the old man, whatever he did, not to go into the poor-house, for they gave you no beer, not though you were dying. My neighbour declared he could not live without his "lush," and with no shamefacedness, with a hint of self-praise even, he told how everything he had got hands on for thirty years back had gone in whisky and that he had drunk enough to float a ship. The younger fellows, prompting each other's memories, bragged of their achievements in the same line. Listening to the three, one could learn their notion of life, indeed the younger men sometimes put it in so many words; it was to drink and drab all that one earned, to share the last copper with a mate and look to him to do the same for you. As soon as I could detect the faintest hint of grey through the skylight I slipped quietly out of bed, took off the semmit in which I had slept, rubbed myself down with my hands and dressed.

"Are ye for awa'?" my old neighbour inquired; and added that it was early yet, too dark to do anything, and so on.

I answered as briefly as possible, and bidding the whole company a civil good-morning made my way out. My semmit I had rolled into a small bundle and I threw it into the first close I passed. At a pie-shop, which was open early to catch labourers, I had some bread-and-butter and a mug of tea. Then I repaired to the Royal Park. It was still the grey of morning; the rain had ceased, though the close sward I walked on felt soft and dewy. How Nature's calm contrasted with the drunken riot of the past midnight! How fresh the air after the stifling atmosphere I had left! I drank it in with joy, even while repeating once more the too-oft repeated line.

Yet, as I recalled something of the morning's incidents, I

had to own that a sparkle of the divine was there.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

NE advantage of my simple way of living was that it cost me little to flit or settle down. An iron bed-stead and some bed-clothes, a table, a chair or two, were about all I needed to furnish my new home. And now for work. I went out to Sparkwell that same evening and talked the question over with Kenneth. Potato-lifting was in progress, and my friend accompanied me to a farm near the village where he thought I might get a start. The potatoes were already bought by a Craigkenneth dealer, and the farmer, who had agreed to supply carts and men, was glad of my help as it left one of his hands free for ordinary work. Kenneth convoyed me back to town.

"I was wantin' to have yer opinion, Jamie, on some scien-

tific subjects," he said.

The problem that was exercising him at the time was, I found, that of glacial action in the Ice Age. That action had usually been made to account for the formation of our great lake-basins. Kenneth had been considering the explanation and he found it inadequate. I, alas! was no authority, but I could listen and put questions, and the talk enticed my friend right into Craigkenneth. Perhaps he was curious to see my new abode as well. At any rate, he needed no coaxing

to accompany me to the top of Guild Street.

"Kenneth," I began, when we had stood some minutes at the mouth of the Vennal watching the noisy throng, "is there a word for those folks? What is the word? Is there some word, some simple truth, that, if it were spoken to those people, would move them, would make them think, would change them, would make them want to lead a human life? For you couldn't call this human—all that drunkenness and racket and filth. These people—the ones, anyway, who do work and don't live by stealing or mouching or prostitution—

these people work like slaves during the week, and at the weekend they give themselves up to drink and lust and rioting. But you would call a human life—wouldn't you?—something like this: to spend your day doing some useful, natural, necessary work, to be kindly and loving and helpful to other people, to be subject only to your own reason and not to a thing like whisky or to a passion like lust or anger? Now, Kenneth, what is the word that could make those people give up their present ways and begin that human life? Do you think there is such a word?"

Kenneth thought a little, and then answered that it was possible; yes, there might be such a thing, he believed there might. At the same time, he had the opinion that most of the Wynd folks were hardly fitted for a different life, and he instanced some he had known who had been taken to better surroundings and had returned to their old haunts.

He was satisfied with my room and believed I might live there "in a natural way." The only fear he would have had for himself was that it might not afford him enough fresh air.

That was the one point I was doubtful about myself.

I went out with Kenneth, meaning to see him clear of the town. We sauntered down Guild Street, and had just passed the Steeple when my heart gave a leap: a tall figure came out of Cowan the music-seller's and crossed the street. It was Nina!

She carried a roll in her arm, probably some music, and was making in the direction of the station. I concluded she was going for the last Aletown train, which was about due to leave. The encounter occupied my thoughts all that evening after I had returned to my lone room. Nina had not glanced at me, and I had not dared to look at her, except for the short time that she was in front of me as she made for the street-corner. Had she seen me and recognised me? I knew enough of women to feel sure that she had. Would she have noticed me had I been alone? I was doubtful, but inclined to think she would not. That night—the first in my own home—sleep was long of coming.

The work in the potato-field was familiar to me from my Mailing experience, and the week passed quietly. On the Saturday we stopped at one, and I had time to prepare for

the other task that waited me in the evening.

It was after seven when I strolled down to the Steeple The space in front was unoccupied, but I did not start speaking.

For one thing, I wanted to see Kenneth and arrange about meeting him later and convoying him home. Besides, it was too early for the ploughmen, the class I was most anxious to reach. I resolved to wait till the half-hour.

Ere long I had reason to fear that I was to be punished for my dilatoriness. Band-music sounded from the foot of Guild Street, and soon the Salvation Army marched round the Steeple and formed in front. I learned, however, from a young fellow who had accosted me and asked if I meant to speak, that the Army would only stay half an hour or so, and then proceed to its own hall. Not wishing to be near it, I sauntered down the street. Different people spoke to me, strangers most of them, though one was a very old acquaintance. He was the mill-man who used to do most of the threshing for Old Nicol at the Mailing. I could remember being sent down to Barbeth once to flag him up and being overtaken by Miss Maymie and the admiral in a dog-cart as we were climbing the Lang Stracht. He halted now as I came forward, and, after remarking that it was a fine night and that the town seemed busy, asked,

"Are ye goin' to give us a few words, Mr. Bryce?"

I had seen him in the crowd at my first speech, but had given him no thought. Had I speculated on the question at all, I should have concluded that, being mixed up so much with farmers and depending on them for custom, Christie would be unfriendly to my doctrines. Yet from his first remarks about the weather and the crowds, from the tone, even, in which he made them, I knew I should have been mistaken. How soon one gets to know! Ere many weeks it was my experience that if I went into a shop, if I asked a question of a porter at the railway station, I could tell from the man's tone, from his look, from his very attitude, whether he was friend or foe.

I told Christie that I meant to start whenever the Salvation

Army left.

"Did ye hear him the last nicht, Jake?" he asked his companion, a stranger to me.

"I did," said the other with emphasis, as if challenging

contradiction, "and I 'greed wi' every word he said."

"I'll tell ye what it is, Mr. Bryce," said the mill-man as emphatically, "ye spoke naething but plain common-sense, I don't care who says onything to the contrar'."

The encouragement, so little looked for, gave me heart. From others, however, I heard comments not so favourable. The young lads who swaggered along with much display of cuff and collar, clerks, as most of them would be, were hostile. They eyed me contemptuously, and often made gibes in a tone to let me overhear. One, I remember, in response to a companion's remark, "There's the fellow that speaks," said jeeringly, "Yes; he wants everybody to be his own master."

Genuine working-people were usually sympathetic. Two youngish men, who proved to be miners, though not employed in the district, spoke to me. One assured me that my suspicions about the Union agents were well grounded. Though miners were mostly in the Union, they had seldom much faith in their agents. Here's what he could tell me from his own experience. He had once been in an Eastern county looking for work. The pit-manager he applied to directed him to the miner's agent: new hands were usually taken on through him. Now, the man put it to me, would the coalmasters have taken on hands through the miner's agent if the agent was really as bitter against them as he professed to be? No. The masters and he were in company.

His mate joined in the talk, and declared that coal strikes were sometimes engineered by the agents and the masters working together. If too much coal had gathered at the pitheads in a district, the masters would give the agent the hint; he would rake up some excuse for bringing the men out. As soon as the coal was cleared away at high prices, some other excuse was found for settling the dispute. The agent was well bribed for this, and so he was really in the pay of both

masters and men.

Kenneth appeared while I was talking with the miners, and I strolled back to the Steeple in his company. It was turned eight o'clock and the Army was taking the collection. The officer in charge had his cap on the ground and was gathering the coins into it, ejaculating a "Hallelujah!" for every copper that fell, and a very unctuous "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" when there was a gleam of silver. Soon the band struck up and away it marched, with the small contingent of women following and some urchins trotting in the rear. I stepped out into the vacant space, and as soon as the music was far enough off to give my voice a chance, I cried.

"Working-men and working-women! I want to say a little more about the things I began to speak of the other

Saturday night."

A good many people who had been hanging about till I should begin closed in almost with a rush, the ploughmen lurched forward more deliberately, and ere I had shouted the opening sentence a second time I had a solid ring of listeners.

"That last night," I went on, "I reminded you of the bad state that you and I are living in. We do all the useful work, we get for it a wage that's just enough to keep us fit for working more, and most of the profits of our work go to a handful of people who don't work at all. I mentioned the different bodies we had looked to for help—Parliament, Trade Unions, the Labour Party—and I showed that these had left us, and always would leave us, just where we are. I told you—"

The young tradesman who had interrupted me so often the last night, and had been in wait for me this evening, called out,

"What society pays you for this?"

"I told you—" I repeated, when he shouted vehemently, "Answer my question What society pays you for coming

"Answer my question, What society pays you for coming here and speaking?"

"Let the man go on," "Give the fellow fair play," called

some voices; and the tradesman responded,

"I'll let him go on if he promises to answer my question before he goes away."

"I told you-" I said once more, amid laughter.

"Answer my question, answer my question," yelled the

tradesman with equal persistency.

"I'll tell ye," said a young, sturdy, fair-haired ploughman whom I had seen with carts about Sparkwell, "I'll tell ye wha pays him."

The other looked to him and demanded, "Who is it?"

"The man he works to," answered the ploughman; and the roar that followed overwhelmed my questioner and drowned opposition of every sort. I resumed amid tolerable quietness:

"I told you there was a cure for the wrongs we are bearing, and I promised to tell you what that cure, that only and all-

sufficient cure, is. This I will now tell you."

There was quite an expectant hush as I said this, and trying to lose no time I dashed on:

"One person owns all the land of a parish and the rest of the folk have none. A ploughman feels that this is unfair, and he goes out one day to a corner of ground that isn't cultivated and squats on it. What happens? The laird sends a keeper to shift him. The ploughman won't be shifted. What then? The laird goes to the law-courts and gets an order that the ploughman must leave. The ploughman still refuses. What happens next? The policeman of the district is sent to turn him away, and, if some of the squatter's friends come to help him, a lot of policemen from other districts are called in." (Here I noticed some of my hearers winking and nodding in the direction of two policemen who had stationed themselves a little way down the street and within range of my voice.) "Even these are not a match for the ploughman and his friends. What's the next move? The soldiers are brought down from the castle there with their rifles and bayonets, and if the squatter and his friends still keep their ground the soldiers will shoot and stab them dead. A landlord, therefore, can't hold his land himself; left to himself he is helpless. He holds it because he is backed up by gamekeepers, policemen, and soldiers. And who are these keepers, policemen, and soldiers? Men who belonged to the working-class to begin with, but have become a weapon in the landlords' hands to keep the workers down."

Here a tall and rather good-looking young fellow, smart and well dressed, advanced on me and, putting up his fists,

asked,

"Can you fight?"

Some of the listeners seemed ready to enjoy the sport that was coming; others called, "Leave the man alone," "Give the fellow fair play." My challenger, who was tipsy, shouted, "I'm an old soldier and I won't hear the British Army abused. Can you fight? Can you fight?" Some acquaintances tried to haul him away, and nearly dragged the jacket off his back. This excited him the more, and slipping from their clutches he ran forward as if he would strike me, shouting. "Put up your hands." A little fellow, a head and a half shorter, sprang in between us and gave him a sharp blow on the chest, His friends caught him once more and managed to draw him back. I resumed:

"Of course I am aware that they give a very different reason for having policemen and soldiers. They say that the police are there to protect property, and that soldiers are there to defend our country. But that can have no meaning for us working-people, for we have no property to protect, we have no country to defend. The property all belongs to our masters, the country belongs to the lairds. Let the lairds and the employers be their own policemen and soldiers."

A thin-faced, grey-bearded man, with a very consequential look and tone, interrupted me with, "Who has that property, will ye tell me?" and he pointed down the street to a range of warehouses owned by the Co-operative Society. "Does that not belong to working-folk?" I did not answer, but

pursued my own argument:

"It appears, then, that if we working-people are kept down, it is simply because we lend ourselves as weapons to the masters. Stop that and the masters are helpless, they are

masters no longer."

"And we're to let the Germans invade our country?" cried a very little bandy-legged fellow who had, however, an intelligent face with particularly full bright eyes. Again I left the questioner to find his own answer, and went on:

"But one of you working-men may say, 'I'm not a game-keeper, a policeman, or a soldier. How, then, can I be to blame for the condition of myself and my class?' I'll show you. You're employed in a big foundry or a pit, or maybe on the railway. How is that big concern carried on? Not by the owners, for those owners are a lot of idle shareholders, ladies many of them, who know nothing at all about the business. What do they do? They appoint a manager who does know something about it, and he appoints under-managers and foremen and gaffers of all kinds, and it's these men that drive on the workers and wring the profits out of them. And all this crew of managers and sub-managers and gaffers and foremen were at one time working-men themselves, and for the sake of a little bigger pay and a little better position have betrayed their class and become the masters' tools."

A big man, his red face like to burst with rage, could keep silent no longer. "I'm damned if that should be allowed," he shouted; "I never listened to such treason in my life. The authorities should put it down; the scoundrel should be transported." The outburst excited a good deal of merriment, and called forth such sallies as "He's hittin' ye ower

sair, Tammas," "Ye'll hae to throw up yer job, Tammas." I learned afterwards the secret of the good man's indignation: he was a foreman in a big carting establishment. Once he was silent, smothered under the ironical sympathy of his neighbours, I proceeded:

"You tell me that you are not a manager or a foreman or a gaffer. No; because you never had the chance. The masters know—and it's this that gives them their power they know that, if they wanted a slave-driver on Monday morning, there's not one man in ten of us but would jump

at the job.

"Now," I continued, "there are some women listening to me. I want to show you women that you are keeping yourselves down by the very same conduct. You are employed in a big warehouse making fine dresses which your master sells at a high profit to rich ladies. You have to tear on at the needle or the machine for ten hours at least every day; you can't afford fine dresses; your weekly wage is a few shillings, that will hardly keep you in the plainest food and the commonest clothes. It's surely unfair that the girls who do the work and make the profits of the warehouse should be so cruelly driven and so poorly paid! How does it happen? In this way. Your employer, the man who owns the warehouse, takes very little to do with you and is seldom seen in the workroom. He manages the business by this plan. He looks about among you girls, he chooses one that seems well fitted for the post, he gives her a rise of pay and sets her over the workroom. That girl bullies you, drives you on without mercy, takes the last ha'pennyworth of work out of your needles. And any one girl in the workroom that the master had pitched on would have gladly taken the post. It's as clear as daylight, then, that, both with women and with men, we working people are keeping ourselves and our fellow-workers down.'

At this point a powerfully-built, swarthy-looking mana working-blacksmith I found him to be—took advantage of

the pause I made to ask,

"I wish you would tell us, Mr. Bryce, what a man is to do that has a wife and family. Is he not justified in considering them?"

The question was evidently prompted by genuine feeling; it appealed to me, too, on its own merits, and, contrary to

my practice, I tried to answer it, though I still addressed the

audience, not the individual questioner.

"When I give you this advice, when I tell you never to take a position that will set you above another worker, I'm not giving you advice that will bring you or your wife and family to starvation. I'm merely telling you to remain as you are, to continue a common worker, and to refuse the few shillings—the few pounds, if you like—with which your masters would bribe you and make you their tool. means a certain sacrifice, I admit. But are you not prepared to make some sacrifice for your own and your fellows' deliverance? You are loud in praise of martyrs who laid down their lives long ago for this cause or that, usually for something you know little about. Yet you haggle at losing, not your life, not even your livelihood, but an extra shilling or two on your week's pay! And at making this petty sacrifice for a cause that deserves your best blood! If you stick at that you'll never be free, and, what's more, you'll never deserve your freedom."

I had been led into a little rhetoric; however, it was genuine enough and my audience recognised this, for they responded with a cheer, the first that had ever greeted word of mine.

It was in my usual matter-of-fact tone that I ended:

"At any rate, you can't say that you haven't been told the secret. You've been told how to free yourselves and your class. Keep to the level! Accept no post like that of manager or foreman that will set you above your fellow-workers and make you drive them on; no post like that of soldier or policeman that will make you coerce them in the interest of the rich. Keep to the level! And there's not an estate in the country, not a factory or a foundry, not a mill or a mine, a railway, a shipyard, or any industrial establishment whatever that could be conducted on its present lines for one day. The masters' power would be gone, and the way would be open for the people to go in and take possession."

Among those who spoke to me afterwards, as Kenneth and I sauntered through the streets, was a youth somewhat like myself for age, Irish and a Catholic. Devine was his name. He was a moulder to trade and belonged to Fallowkirk; he had only been about Craigkenneth a few weeks. This youth, a devout believer in the Social Democratic Federation, whatever that may be, was familiar with the Socialist move-

ment not only at home but on the Continent and in America, gave me a pamphlet by Jaurès and asked if I had read the late speech of Bebel in the German Reichstag. He had

two strictures to pass on my remarks.

"You made out the army to be the weapon of the rich," he said. "So it is at present. But it never seems to have occurred to you that the army may become Socialistic and be perhaps the instrument for establishing a Socialistic state."

"No," I admitted, in some surprise, "certainly that never did occur to me. Soldiers will always obey their officers, and the officers all belong to the privileged class. The whole training of a soldier is meant to make him an unthinking tool

in the hands of his superiors."

"Ay, but it doesn't, at least with the intelligent ones, though of course they are commoner in a continental army than here where conscription isn't in force. I've a friend in Fallowkirk, Herr Plitt—he had to clear out of Germany because he was speaking his mind too freely—well, he tells me that the German army is a hotbed of Socialism. The German army! The army that's usually thought to be the strongest weapon that the despots have! Herr Plitt declares that young fellows who go up from country districts become Socialists in no time, and, when their term of service is out, they go back to the country and spread Socialism there. He says that Germany is the most Socialistic country in the world, and the army is the most Socialistic body in Germany."

I laughed rather incredulously.

"If that's so," I said, "the poor Kaiser is leaning on a

broken reed. I don't believe your friend, all the same."

"I believe him, though, and here's a proof that he knows what he's talking about. You mind the big Labour riots in Alsace last year? Well, why weren't the troops called out to put down the riots? Because the authorities couldn't trust them; they couldn't be sure that the soldiers would obey when they were ordered to fire."

This I could not answer; I had no information, and could only reason from what was likely. In his other criticism

Devine had not all the argument to himself.

"When you're speaking," he said, "you give your own opinion, you say that things ought to be so-and-so. That's right enough; only, you ought to back it up with authorities.

That's what tells with an audience. You should give Giffen's figures about the average wage of the workers; you should mention the total income of the country, and what proportion goes into a few hands. When you were on the land-question, now, you had a fine chance of bringing the abuses of the system home to them; you might have told them on the authority of John Bright that half of Scotland belongs to a dozen landlords. Your speeches would have far more weight if you gave plenty of authorities. If I were you, I'd quote the Social Reform leaders often; I'd say, 'Karl Marx, the famous German writer, says so-and-so,' or 'Listen to what Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace says on this.' You know all those men well enough."

"No," I said, "I don't."

"Oh yes, you do; although you don't show it off."
"No," I repeated, "I haven't read a great deal in that line; indeed, some of those writers are merely names to me. But even if I had them all off, I wouldn't quote them. What I want people to do, and what I think they need most to do, is to look at things with their own eyes. They don't need Russell Wallace to tell them that one man has no right to own all the land in a parish."

"No; but Russell Wallace shows how the land-system originated, and how the land has been grabbed at particular

times."

"It doesn't matter how or when the land was grabbed; the people, if they will only think, will know that one man had no right to grab it. I'm convinced, even, that this quoting of authorities does more harm than good."

"I don't see that."

"It does in this way: it leads people to believe that Social Reform is a very intricate question, and that a person isn't entitled to have any opinion on it till he has gone into all the literature of the subject; in fact, that the ordinary person isn't qualified to have an opinion on it at all: he should take the opinion of experts. Is the common man never to get thinking for himself? At one time he had to believe what the Bible said, or rather what the priests, who had time and learning to study it, told him that it said." I did not know at this time that Devine was a devout Catholic, and he told me afterwards that the reference hurt him. "Now." I continued, "the books of Marx and Wallace and the rest of them are to be our Bible, and the Labour leaders who have studied those books, or at least quote the titles, are to be our priests. That's just as bad. What can those writers, or the fellows that profess to interpret them, know about what's fair and reasonable that an intelligent workman doesn't know? In fact, I would back the workman against them any day, provided he used his own brains and wasn't misled by authority; for he has had to do with real things all his life; the other fellows have never been in touch with reality: they have

lived among figures and theories."

While we differed on those points, I was interested in the Irish lad. Wonderful how, with his poor chances, his education, on one line at least, had gone so far! I was not aware at the time of the curious contradiction in his life—the ardent reformer being also a devout son of the Church. But ere we parted that night I found that in another way he afforded an instance of the ghastly contrasts that meet nowadays in the same individual. He mentioned that he had heard me speak the first night, and had been very anxious to make my acquaintance. He had ascertained that I was staying at the Well, and he would have liked to come out on the Sunday and have a talk with me.

"I'd have been pleased to see you," I assured him.

"Yes, I know; but, to tell you the plain truth, I had no Sunday clothes, and I didn't like to be visiting people on a Sunday in my working things. I was a long time out of work in Fallowkirk and I had to pawn my good clothes. It's only this week that I was able to get them out."

As Kenneth and I strolled along the country road that night, my friend seemed to be interested, like myself, in the young Irishman; and, while taking my side in the argument, he allowed that Devine was "a bit o' a thinker," adding, however,

"he's no the finished article yet."

# CHAPTER XXXIX

Y old friends of the strawberry-fields knew by this time that I was their neighbour in the Wynds, and when we met they welcomed me heartily but with evident surprise; indeed, their treatment of me was always an odd mixture of freedom and respect. It was about the middle of the week, on the Wednesday evening, I think, as I was on my way home and had reached the top of Guild Street, that Sarah Doyle, who was standing with another girl, danced across to me and, linking her arm in mine, accompanied me up the Wynd.

"I've been looking out for you, Jamie," she said. "You've got to do something for me, and I'll give you a kiss when

you're sleeping."

She went on to explain that it was to write a letter for an old man who lived on her stair. She pointed out the entry and gave me the needed directions. I had not meant to come out again that night. The previous day I had got a thorough drenching, and I had felt chilled and heavy ever since. However, I could not refuse Sarah, and after supper I went round to the house. This may be the fitting place to give the history of the person who was needing my services. My information came to me in scraps from Sarah, from other neighbours, and from the old man himself.

Angus Grant, though now a denizen of the region peopled by the Irish race, was a Highlander by blood and birth. Long, long ago, in some of the great Highland clearances, his parents had been driven south, and all Angus's life except his childhood had been spent about Craigkenneth, where he had been mostly employed at the salmon fisheries on the Fertha. As a boy he had lived with his parents in the Wynds when the Wynds were inhabited by reputable natives; now, an old man and alone, he lived there still. His wife had been

a cripple. When only a girl she had broken her leg by falling off a swing, but to all appearance had perfectly recovered, and in early womanhood had married Angus, with whom she had been at school. After marriage the lameness returned and she became a cripple, going on crutches. Angus was devoted to his lame wife; when his own work was over he would wash out the house, even wash the children's clothes-took nothing a toil if he could spare her. He had a hot temper and a quick tongue; she was mild and prudent, giving the soft answer, and for reward seeing her husband calm down and be gentler than before. She died, leaving a family of girls, some in their teens. They grew to womanhood, married one by one, all but the youngest, Jessie, who kept the father's house. Next close to Angus lived Archie Cuthill, a friend from schooldays. He was in his last illness-lay nearly a year, attended by his wife and, when duty allowed, by Angus. When he died he left his widow three hundred pounds. She kept on her house and ere long married Angus, now a man of sixty. From the moment she came into Angus's house she set herself against Jessie, and when the father did not at once take her side she turned on him. One day, in the course of a wild quarrel, old Angus opened the door and threw his wife into the street, daring her ever to set foot in his house again. This was only a few weeks after the marriage, so short a time, indeed, that the woman had not broken up her house. She tried to return, but Angus was obdurate; friends sought to reconcile them: in vain. Years passed and the woman died, attended only by strangers. The Inspector of Poor came to Angus to ask about the funeral arrangements. Up went Angus's hand.

"I'll take nothing to do with the bitch whatever."

"But where will we bury her?"

"Bury her in hell."

After the funeral came the inspector again.

"There's money you're entitled to-three hundred pounds."

Up went Angus's hand once more.

"I don't want the money."

"But what 'll we do with it?"

"Do with it what you like. I'll never touch a penny."

And he never did.

Such was the stiffnecked old gentleman that I was now to

visit. Sarah was with him, and opened the door when she heard me climbing the stair.

"You're right now, daddie," she said, "here's the kipper

that'll write you a letter as long as yourself."

"And it is kind of you, sir, to help the old man," said Angus, rising from a great highbacked elbow-chair at the fireside.

His accent was as Highland as though he had never left the north. Probably in his boyhood his neighbours had been

evicted families, like his own.

Once of fair height, he was now a good deal bent. His hair and beard were snow-white, but his cheeks, though wrinkled and very worn, kept a patch of healthy colour. He wore no moustache, and I could note the firm mouth and protruding under-lip. Sarah had warned me, else I should never have known, that he was nearly blind.

"But it's for me he's doing it as much as you, daddie,"

said Sarah gaily. "I've promised him something rare."

The worn face softened a little; one could not say smiled. "You will be going on with your nonsense. But Sarah

is a good lass to the old man."

"Well, daddie, I've told him you want him to write a letter for you. It's to a daughter in Canada, Jamie," she explained. "She's been in Canada for a long time—fifteen years, isn't it, daddie?"

"It is sixteen years come March, the twelfth of March,

since she sailed from Glasgow."

"Oh yes," I said. "Well, you'll just give me an idea of what you want said. Am I to answer her last letter?"

"No, you are not," said old Angus, "for I do not get letters

from her, and I never will get a letter from her."

"Oh!" I said, somewhat mystified. "And what makes you think that, may I ask?"

"I know it," answered the old man with quiet decision.

"But why?"

"This way. Agnes used to write to me very often, and was very mindful of her old father, and the last time she wrote to me—and it is five years past in September—she said she had a sore wearying to see a sprig of Scottish heather. And I sent down to my daughter Flora in Bridge Street, and I got Flora's little girl to lead me out to Barnton House, and I asked to see Colonel Aikman, and when Colonel Aikman came to the door I asked him if he would give me leave to go out to the

moor and pull a bit heather, and I told the colonel what it was for. And Colonel Aikman gave me leave at once, and we went on to the moor, and I got the child to pull a good handful of heather. And when we came back to Flora's house I made up the heather in a nice pasteboard box, and I gave it to Flora's man to post, and I gave him a shilling to post it. And he came back and gave me fourpence of change and said it was eightpence for posting. And he never posted it; he spent the eightpence on drink."

"Oh, surely not!" I could not help saying.

"It's as true as death," affirmed old Angus solemnly.

"But what makes you think that?"

"Think that!" he cried. "Do I not know? Would Agnes have taken a box of heather from her own father and never written a word to say she had got it?"

"No. Only it might have gone amissing. It's a long

journey, you know, to Canada."

"The heather never saw the post office," said the old man impatiently. "That scoundrel made away with it and spent the eightpence in the public-house."

"But," I asked, "have you any other reason for suspecting

that your son-in-law would do such a thing?"

"I know it; I do not suspect it. He is fit for anything."
"Has your daughter not written to anybody else since then?

To any of her sisters?"
"She has. She has written to Flora."

"And does she not let you see-does she not read the letters

to you?"

"She does not. She does not let me know that she gets letters. She pretends she gets none any more than myself. But I know better."

"But what can be her reason for not reading the letters to

you?"

"She and her man are afraid that I might jalouse what way Agnes does not write to me when she is writing to them. And they think it the best way to pretend that she does not write to anybody."

I thought it likely the old man was altogether mistaken, and I might not have done the trifling service without some

misgiving; but in a little he added,

"And, oh! I weary to hear from Agnes. I would like sore, sore to have a line from her before I go."

"Well, the best way would be to write and tell her how much you wish to hear from her. No doubt she will answer at once if—if she's all right."

"That would be the best way, sir;" and his voice showed

his agitation. "But I cannot see-"

"Oh, that's all right. I'll be glad to attend to that."

Then the old man fairly broke down.

"Oh, sir! would you?" and the tears gushed from his sightless eyes. "Oh! if you would do that, I would never forget——"But he could say no more for weeping, and I saw that Sarah was busy with her eyes as well.

When old Angus had steadied himself, I asked, "Have you still your daughter's address?"

"I have, and I will get it for you this minute;" and, raising himself by the help of the chair, he went to a press and brought back an old letter with the heading:

"34, Gower St., W.,
Prescott, Grenville Co.,
Ontario."

Agnes's married name was Chisholm.

"And now, sir," said old Angus, when I had noted the address and the particulars I was to mention, "I will give you the money to pay for the letter, but I will never be able to pay for your kindness."

I was about to decline with a laugh when Sarah put up her

hand warningly, and I let the old man go on.

"It is twopence ha'penny you will pay for the stamp-"

"I rather think," I interrupted, "that the postage to Canada now is only a penny. However, I can let you know afterwards."

"You will do so. And there will be a penny for the paper." Sarah again gave me the warning sign; so I promised to let the old man have the full account when I learned what it was. I assured him the letter would be posted that night ere I slept, and I came away rather hurriedly, for his gratitude threatened to overcome him a second time. Sarah saw me to the foot of the stair, but it was less to keep me from tripping, as she said, than to bestow the promised fee.

Neither the service nor the reward did anything to stave off the cold that had threatened me. By morning my old cough—bronchial catarrh, I had learned to call it—was

troublesome. I crawled out and posted a card to Bain, the Sparkwell farmer, called at the nearest chemist's and laid in a bottle of the mixture that Sir William had prescribed long ago; then I took to bed, ready to stand the siege. I was too dull and heavy to read, even to think; my appetite was gonea lucky thing, perhaps, for I was spared the trouble of rising to prepare food; and the rain and wind that beat on my window, for the weather was stormy, did not lighten my spirits. On the Saturday night Kenneth visited me and found me in bed. I warned him not to speak of my illness. Sarah, I knew, would be willing enough to nurse me, and for both our sakes I felt it better that she should not have the chance. Kenneth called again on the Sunday, when I was livelier and able to interest myself in his theories about the formation of lake-basins. Next day I was up for some hours, though feeling very shaky, considering the short time I had been ill. I read a good deal; at least, I often had a book in my hand, though my thoughts were apt to wander in strange ways of their own. Another pastime kept me interested: it was to work at a set of verses that I had started during my stay in the strawberryfield. The women there had been mostly Irish, and I had begun to reflect how much of the heavy and useful labour of the world falls to that race. My present surroundings made me feel this again. The Wynds were full of Irish navvies, who were called on whenever any rough job had to be done. I had tried to picture their lot and foreshadow their destiny, and by the Thursday evening the piece was so well forward that I started writing it out in a fair copy. It was entitled

#### PAT.

Where'er my roving glances range,—
O'er places known,
Or distant regions, new and strange,
The crowded town,
The street, the country-road, the mart,
The roaring quay,—
Now with his fellows, now apart,
One form I see.

All quarters are his home—the banks
Of Tyne and Clyde;
Manhattan wharves, where thronged ranks
Of vessels ride;
And ports remote, by inland shore
And river-mouth,
Where Parana and Murray pour
Into the South.

Small grace he hath or beauty: black
His brow and grim;
But stout his arm and broad his back,
Supple his limb;
And as with lumbering steer or horse
For burden meant,
Upon all wearing toils his force
Is freely spent.

He lays the track for rushing trains,
He shapes the log,
He rears the archéd bridge, he drains
And delves the bog,
Or down the forest river drifts
Upon the raft,
Or quarries deep in rocky clifts,
Or sinks the shaft,

And tunnels in earth's nether glooms
Where death-mists choke,
Or feeds the furnace as it fumes
Its poison-smoke,
Or keeps, in soldier-habit now
The rain-filled trench,
Or, jesting, sees his life-blood flow
Strange fields to drench.

### What spot-

At this point I heard someone climbing the stair; the next moment there was a knock. I rose and opened the door. The stair-head was almost dark, but the gaslight from my room enabled the visitor to recognise me, and a boyish voice said,

"Oh, Mr. Bryce, how do you do?"

The voice was quite familiar and I should soon have hit the name, but the visitor did not leave me time.

"I'm Frank Harvey," he said.

"So you are," I said, with a strange feeling of pleasure, and I was drawing him in when a tall figure, that had been concealed by the bend of the stair, stepped up. I needed no light to recognise Nina.

She held out her hand, perhaps to keep me from attempting

any more familiar greeting in her cousin's presence.

"You'll come back for me at nine," she said to the lad, who explained to me that he had to go home now and would not come in. Nina entered, closing the door behind her. For a moment we stood reading each other's eyes; the next, we were in a close embrace.

"You're not well, Jim," Nina said, eyeing me sharply as we sat hand-in-hand by the fire.

It was only a cold, I told her.

"Only a cold! That's enough, surely; for you know how careful you need to be. Iim. I knew there was something wrong," she went on with emphasis; "I couldn't rest, and I had to come to satisfy myself. Why have you grown so careless about yourself?"

"I'm not careless, Nina," I assured her. "I've done exactly what I was told to do: kept my bed for some days and then stayed in the house. And I'm all right again. But how did you find me out, dear?" I inquired, partly because I was

curious, partly to escape further lecturing.

"Uncle Walter told us a while ago that you were at Spark-

"Yes; but who told you I had left Sparkwell and come here?"

"Well," she said, with a laugh, "I wrote to the Sparkwell

postmaster and asked your address."

"That's not answering my question, Nina," I persisted. "How did you know I had left Sparkwell?"

"Never mind. I knew anyway, and I've found you out.

That's all you need-"

"I could tell you how you knew," I said. "You saw me in Craigkenneth—"

"Never you mind, Jim. Listen you to me. Why have you

grown so careless about yourself?"

"Why, dear! haven't I told you that I've been doing everything I was ordered-staying in bed, staying indoors, and what not?"

"It's not that only, Jim. Why have you become so

untidy?"

"An invalid has an excuse, surely, for-"

"I don't mean just now, Jim. But when you're outside of an evening. Your boots aren't brushed; you wear an old torn jacket.'

"How do you know, Nina?"

"I know: that's enough."

"You know, because you saw me."
"Well, what if I did?"

"But, Nina, how could you see me when you didn't look at me?"

"I saw that much, at any rate, Jim; you were a perfect fright."

"I had been at work, Nina."

"You weren't working at half-past eight at night. You were strolling about the streets, and you hadn't taken the trouble to tidy yourself after supper. Now, here's what I want to say to you, Jim," she went on earnestly; "you may please yourself about the work you do and even the place you stay in, but there's no reason why you should fall into untidy wavs---'

I was about to make a bantering protest, but she went on

in a tone that was almost tearful.

"-and go about in old, torn, muddy clothes and look

as if you belonged to nobody. I can't bear it, Jim."

To be truthful, I had not once thought of this; I had been concerned with things which I should have called more important. Nina's earnestness forced me to attend to her reproaches, and I had to acknowledge to myself that they were deserved. I acknowledged it to her as well, and faithfully promised to change my ways.

"Do you never have your bed made?" she then began.

"Sometimes; not every day, I'm afraid," I admitted rather haltingly.

She had risen, and was soon busy with the neglected duty.

"The bed-clothes are nice enough," she admitted, "but that's because they're new. Ah! there's a flea, though. I've caught it, too, "she added in a satisfied tone.

I jumped up. "Don't! don't kill it, Nina."

She looked at me in amazement.

"Don't!" I repeated, catching her arm. "I never take the life of any creature. Please, Nina!" I entreated, as her surprise gave way to impatience; "I couldn't be happy if I saw any living thing being destroyed."

"Nonsense, Jim! they're meant to be killed."

"I couldn't be the means of killing them, anyway."

"What would you do with it?" she asked in a less impatient tone, though she still kept her thumb pressed tight against her mid-finger.

"Drop it out at the window;" and I held up the low sash. "But it'll go on other people."

"Perhaps not. Anyhow, we've got rid of it without killing it, and that's a great deal.'

"Well, you are ridiculous, Jim," she declared, though I could see that, while still a little puzzled, she was pleased with my action. As for myself, the incident left with me a sense of tenderness and joy which I should vainly try to explain to others.

"Now, about yourself, dear," I said, "are you staying

with your aunt here?"

"Yes; I came through this morning. Mamma knew quite well why I was coming, I could see. Indeed, if she had asked, I should have told her."

We were again sitting by each other hand-in-hand.

"Do you know, Jim," she said in a little, "I'm leaving home?"

I did not speak for a while.

"Are you going back to music?" I asked at length. She nodded.

"Going back to Leipsic?" I inquired.

"No; only to London. I'll stay with the Lobsteins. Herr Lobstein has been there all this year, and some of his pupils have been very successful. I mean to work hard with him this winter, and I may get an engagement in spring." I was silent, and, with her old skill in reading my thoughts on superficial matters, she said, "You don't approve, Jim?"

"I don't know much about the ways of singers," I said; in fact, I don't know anything except by hearsay."

"There'll be all sorts of people among them just as among other classes. Mamma believes everything she hears against them, but that's ridiculous. And, at any rate, I'm going into the work for love of it, and that'll keep me right."

The mention of her mother reminded me that I had not vet inquired for her people. Nina was busy telling me about them all when we were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"That can never be Frank already," I remarked, a little apprehensively.

'He wasn't to come for fully an hour yet," Nina said,

looking her watch.

I opened the door. A young lad was on the stairhead, but even in the bad light I knew it was not Nina's cousin.

"Auld Angus sent me up to see ye," the boy began.

"Oh yes. What was it?"

"He wants to ken hoo much the stamp was for the letter. He says ye promised to tell him."

"So I did," I said, feeling a little amused. "Well, you can say that I haven't been—I haven't been round his way since, but I'll call some day soon and let him know."

The lad promised, and with a word of thanks I bade him

good-night.

On returning to Nina's side I was aware of a change. Her hand, though she allowed me to take it, had lost its warmth; her tone, while she answered my questions about little Tib and Guy and Norah, was as cold as her touch. My tenderness for the girl taught me, more surely than her own confession would have done, what had wrought the change. It was the thought that I was forming new interests, interests in which she had no share; it was the woman's dread of being left out of the loved one's life, of not being taken with him. I thought it best not to remark on her coldness. But I began to tell her, as simply and naturally as I could, something of old Angus's history and character. She was soon interested, and whether or no she understood my purpose in telling her-I am assured in my own heart she did—her coldness passed away and her manner grew tenderer than it had been at the first.

By the time I had satisfied myself about my old Aletown friends it wanted only twenty minutes of the hour set for Frank's return.

"Nina," I said, "there's a thing I want you to do for me."

"Yes, Jim;" and she smiled.

"Do it, then, dear."

"You haven't told me what it is."

"You know already, dear."

"Perhaps I'm mistaken. You had better tell me."
"I want you to sing. Is that what you thought?"
She nodded.

"Will you, dear?" I asked.

"Of course. What would you like?"

"I'll leave the choice to you."

Nina rose, and I gave a laugh, remembering how she never cared to sing except when standing, never cared even to accompany herself. She lost no time in making her selection, for almost before I could conjecture what it might be, she began the sweet song that had made us lovers long ago.

It was a choice I dared not have made. The song was so

charged with tender memories! still more, it voiced, by an odd chance, the feeling that possessed us now. Certainlythough my illness may merit some of the blame-its power was too great for me. "Since Lubin is away-is away-is away "-the catch was at my throat; I had to seek relief as of old.

Yet in the stress of my own emotion I admired how the born singer, while athrill with passion, was lifted by her art above all personal concernment; she was uttering the cry of all lorn maidens, and in the wide wail her own plaint was lost

like a raindrop in the sea.

She had not looked at me while she was singing, and it was only when we were side by side again that she could notice my agitation. She did not speak of it and we sat silent a while, for I could not trust my voice. When I was master of myself and could thank her, I assured her that her old master would find her singing had lost nothing since he heard it last.

She had been practising pretty hard of late, she explained. "When do you go south, Nina?" I asked her. "Have you

arranged the time yet?"

"Yes, at the end of this month," she was beginning, when suddenly, without a sign of warning, she burst into tears, and throwing her arms about me sobbed unrestrainedly. I tried to soothe her with tender words and caresses, and, as had always happened, the passion, wild while it lasted, was soon spent. When she was calm enough to speak she said, still keeping her face hidden on my breast,

"I wish, Jim, you didn't stay here. I don't like to go away and think of you being in such a place."

"Well, dear, I've been feeling myself that it will scarcely suit me. It doesn't give me the fresh air I need, for one thing. I've only taken it by the month, and I can leave at any time."

"I wish you would, Jim. And you'll try to get a place

where you'll be healthier and more comfortable?"

I was reassuring her when a tap sounded on the door and Frank came in to take her away. It was not easy to part, but she had had her cry over-so, indeed, had I-and there was no risk of a second breakdown. She let her cousin go out before her, and as we were taking good-bye she little table and proceeded to make an end of whispered.

"You'll need a little money, Jim, if you're to have a decenter place to stay in, and you won't have any. I've got plenty, and if I send you some, Jim, you won't send it back? Please,

dear," she pleaded.

But I assured her I had money in the bank, and to satisfy her mentioned how much. Then we kissed and said goodbye; but, after we had parted, a fond impulse brought us together again, and we stood in each other's arms a long while.

The room looked rather desolate as I threw myself into the chair Nina had occupied. I gazed long into the glowing fire, where doubtless many a man and maid before me of high and low degree had seen reflected their own joy and sadness. My thoughts dwelt less, perhaps, on what had passed between us two than on what had been left unspoken. There was a change in my poor sweetheart. Her face, so round and babyish before, was thinner, and at times, especially when we were sitting silent, had a thoughtful, even sad, expression it never used to wear. It was my punishment for the worldliness of my past life to see the change and to know I was the cause. Poor Nina! I thought, too, with tender pity and with some misgiving as well, of the girl away from home and from loved ones, struggling among strangers and rivals, in surroundings, too, that would have much that was repellent and not a little, perhaps, that was evil and dangerous. That reflection, too, was part of my punishment. These rather dowie thoughts held held me a long time, but I shook myself up at last. I tried to hope well for my brave sweetheart: change might be her best restorative, and her devotion to her art would be the charm to keep her safe. For myself, I did not for an instant repent of my great change. It was my old self that had wrought the entanglements which made me suffer now, and while I accepted the punishment for the past I knew that my feet were at last in the true way. I rose and stood at the window, looking down into the broad, dimly-lighted street. Figures were but ill discerned, but I could hear the voices of men and women and the noise of children at play. It recalled me to the living interests in which I was now partaker. As I turned from the window my eye fell on the verses I had been copying when Nina came in, and, shaking off gloomy apprehensions and pensive memories alike, I drew my chair to the little table and proceeded to make an end of

#### PAT.

Knows not his toils?
From every region he hath won
Its golden spoils.
An uncouth Atlas, lo! he stands:
His woeful lot
To bear the world upon his hands,—
And know it not.

And know it not! for crafty men
Have wrought a tomb
About his spirit, black as when
The night doth gloom.
And wisely, certes, they begrudge
The boon of light,
In fear to lose their stubborn drudge,
Their Gibeonite.

Methinks I note a random hint
That wakened sense
Perceives the answering dawn-light glint
Through darkness dense;
And long ere noonday shall he know
A tyrant knave
In each fair-spoken lord, and lo!
Himself a slave.

And when beneath the unwieldy lands
No more he'll stoop
With broadened shoulders, outspread hands,
To bear them up,—
The kingdoms of the earth, that flush
In grandeur sit,
Shall shift, shall rock, shall headlong rush
Into the pit.

on my life.

## CHAPTER XL

By the Monday of the next week I was hardened off. Work, too, was ready for me. Bain, who would know my history by now and had, I suspect, a certain kindness for me, had sent a message by Kenneth that I might have part of his turnips to shaw. The rate we agreed on was three ha'pence per hundred yards for the yellows and twopence for swedes. I had a fellow-worker, an elderly man from Craigkenneth, Geordie Balloch. I shall say something about him here, for, as has often been my experience, our short and casual relationship left a deep mark

Geordie had been bred to the plough, had afterwards been a pit-sinker, and for many, many years a quarryman. Others have told me, for he was no boaster himself, that till disabled by asthma he had been both a skilful and an indefatigable worker. At week-ends his earnings were regularly melted in drink, and his wife could take glass about. Geordie himself told me the very first day we were together that if he had had all the money he had spent on whisky he would have been independent that day. He was still a fine-looking man, of tall, indeed stately, presence, well-featured and fresh-coloured. But for his shortness of breath he could have done

a day's work yet with any labourer.

Bain occasionally turned all his hands on to the turnips when there was nothing else to do, and the whole field was cleared by the Friday afternoon. Our lots were duly measured, and when we went into the farm-kitchen to reckon up our earnings, Bain gave us an agreeable surprise by telling us that he meant to pay twopence overhead. He was the only farmer I had ever known who paid more than he promised; Geordie, whose experience of country life was so much longer than mine, made the same admission. We got our money

and came off much elated. By the time we entered Craigkenneth the short day had darkened. Geordie stayed in a rookery near the river; he pointed out the house, but to my surprise accompanied me further up the street.

"We'll go in here, Jamie;" and he headed across to a

unpretending public-house.

I excused myself, said I should go right on.

"Come on, man," he urged; "we've had a cauld job and it's a cauld nicht. We'll be a' the better o' something to warm us up."

I still held back.

"Come on, man;" and he caught my arm. "I wad like to stand ye a glass. We've been guid neebours, and it's hard

to say if we may ever work thegither again."

The publican himself was behind the counter—a short, grey-bearded man, most respectable in dress and look, and, as I afterwards found from his talk, an intelligent, indeed an altogether superior, person. But what made that public-house visit memorable to me was the thing that happened on our entrance. As soon as we had passed the time of day and before a word was said about ordering drink, old Geordie threw down a half-sovereign of his earnings on the counter and said,

"Mak' yersel' richt oot o' that."

The publican, after referring to a little pocket-book, drew the half-sovereign into the till and handed Geordie back some silver and copper. Geordie then asked what I would have, and the drinks were called for.

I had long known that some publicans made a practice of giving drink on credit. This was the first time I had seen proof. Why it affected me so keenly I cannot quite explain. Perhaps it was because I knew with what hardships Geordie had earned the money that now cleared his score. Or it may have been the thought of our comfortable-looking, respectable, superior host encouraging, at least, allowing poor old Geordie, to run up such a score. Anyway, the thing so sickened me that I felt like never entering a bar or touching strong drink more. The feeling, on reflection, passed into a resolve which I have kept pretty faithfully, which too, like some already spoken of, has brought me many a glad thought and not one regret.

My acquaintance with the Wynds had shown me that the

misery there was aggravated by drink. I had only to recall my bothy days to know that the same was true of country life. So on the Saturday night, when I took my place at the Steeple, this was the cry I raised,
"Working men and Working-women! I want to speak

to-night about a thing that has a great deal to do with keeping

us down: that is, drink."

A good many of my regular hearers had been gathering about the Steeple from the time I appeared; as soon as I moved into the street, they made a ring, so that an audience was found ere I began to speak. A young fellow, little and slight, black-haired and sallow-skinned, who had been moving here and there very unsteadily, now sat down on the kerb at my right hand. I might have used him as a living illustration for my discourse; only I had soon reason to suspect

that he was not so drunk as he looked. I proceeded:

"There are many ways of looking at this subject of drink; I mean to look at it only as it affects us working-people." ("Oh, he's one of the working-people!" remarked the young fellow as if to himself, though in a voice that could be heard by the audience). "They say we working-people drink too much." ("We working-people!" chortled my neighbour sarcastically.) "But why do we drink? What makes anybody drink? In an old book that's said to have been written by Solomon there's a passage that tells the secret." ("Oh, I thought he didn't believe the Bible!") "But I'll give you it in the words of one that you'll believe more readily even than Solomon; I'll give you it in the words of Robert Burns. Here's how Burns puts it:

> " Gie him strong drink, until he wink, That's sinking in despair; And liquor guid to fire his bluid That's prest wi' grief and care. There let him bouse and deep carouse Wi' bumpers flowing o'er, Till he forgets his loves and debts. And minds his griefs no more.'

"Till he forgets! There's what drink does for a man:

it makes him forget."

Here a young fellow, a mechanic, pretty drunk—he had accosted me one Saturday before and expressed disapproval of my teaching-stalked into the ring and with most dramatic

tone and gesture, exclaimed, "Mr. Bryce! this must cease." The audience only laughed, and he stalked away without other word.

"People sometimes wonder," I continued, "why a tramp, a beggar on the road, will spend the coppers he gets in drink. Wouldn't he be far better to buy food? Yes; but think of the life he has to lead. No natural work to do, no home, nobody to care for, nobody to care for him, getting doors slammed in his face, hunted by the police " (" Hunted by the police!" repeated my friend on the kerb; "so should somebody else"), "lying out at nights behind a stack-can you wonder if, when he is master of a copper or two, he should spend them on something that will make him forget the degradation and misery of his life? Bread might fill his belly; but it wouldn't do what the whisky does: it wouldn't make him forget. It's the same with us working-people." The fellow on the kerb again chortled "Us working-people!" and there was an incident of greater moment. Two policemen forced their way through the ring at my left hand and came to my side, as if they wished to address me. When they did not speak, I went on.

"Think of the navvy standing all day in a wet drain working away with his pick and shovel " (" Pick and shovel! He knows a lot about pick and shovel!" remarked my friend on the kerb) "while a ganger stands over him swearing. Is it

surprising-"

Here one of the policemen, a sergeant, stepping yet closer to me, said,

"You can't go on speaking here."

So surprised was I that I could not at first open my mouth.

"I can't go on speaking here!" I said at length.

"No; we have orders that you are to stop speaking."

"How's that?" I asked.

"There have been complaints, and you're not to speak here."

The crowd had closed in to have the benefit of the dialogue,

and one young man, a regular hearer, came to my side.

"Have you anything to say?" said the sergeant, eyeing him impudently.

"No; but I want to hear," the young man replied.
"Do you mean," I inquired, "that it's only at this place I'm not to speak?"

"We've orders that you're not to speak. We can't have

the street obstructed."

"Have you any orders about other people? I've seen all sorts of people speaking here. Have you any orders about them?"

"We'll stop them if they obstruct the street."

"But I'm not obstructing the street. There's plenty of room for people to pass."

"We can't have such a crowd here. You must move out

of this."

"What about the Salvation Army? They block the top

of Market Street entirely."

"They're not there now," said the policeman shortly. He had out his note-book by this time and asked my name and address, which in the flurry I was simple enough to give. "Well," I said at last, "I'll have to decide for myself about

"Well," I said at last, "I'll have to decide for myself about speaking or not speaking," and I moved away. The police-

man merely gave a contemptuous smile for reply.

Thinking over the incident, I felt anything but satisfied with my behaviour. It was my temperament that was to blame. I am a slow coach, and of no use when a rapid decision is called for. So well was I aware of the failing that in my factor days, when any proposition was sprung on me, I made it a rule to answer, "I'll think over it and let you know in a day or two." True, this rule would have helped me little in my Saturday night's predicament, policemen being gentry who do not usually give you a day or two to think things over. I might, certainly, have kept on speaking, as voices in the crowd encouraged me to do, and have faced the consequences. At times I regretted I had not. Most of all, I reproached myself for giving my name and address. Why should a person, because he happens to wear uniform, have the right to make that insolent inquisition? I began to ask. If I had kept my wits, I should have met it with a counterdemand: "Yes, I'll be quite pleased to tell you, but only after you have given me that information about yourself. Who are you? What's your name?"

Of course, the excuse which the police had alleged for interfering with me was a sham. I had caused no obstruction, none at least that scores of street orators had not caused with impunity. My one offence was that I spoke the bitter truth. For that the authorities had determined to crush me, and the

police were glad to be their tools because I spoke the truth about them. Yes; the quacks who stuffed the people with lies and superstitions about body and soul might roar themselves hoarse; if a man spoke a word of truth, he was choked off.

I did not mean to submit. Not once had I that thought. Only, I did not as yet see how I could resist effectively, and of the suggestions with which my street acquaintances were so liberal none was satisfactory. The next Saturday night came and I made no attempt to speak, for I was still waiting for light; when it did break it was in the last quarter I should have looked to.

One day I had been kept from working by heavy rain. It faired at night, and to breathe the fresh air after the day's imprisonment I strolled out and, letting my feet choose their own course, I found myself ere long at the bridge. As I stood resting my arms on the low parapet on the north side, I could see the track left by the bridge-lamp on the brimming river; I could hear the splash and gurgle in the piers beneath me, though my thoughts, I can remember, were far enough away. Such as they were, I was not suffered to indulge them. I soon became aware that a policeman whom I had passed on the quiet street some minutes before had followed me, and was now with measured and, as seemed to me, lordly tread bearing down upon me. My temper caught fire as I surmised some new pretext for molestation.

"That's a better night now," he said, halting at my side. After a single glance round on hearing his approach, I had resumed my contemplation of the river, and to his remark, which was made in a friendly, even hearty tone, I gave no

answer by word or sign.

"Man, the water's heavy," he went on, not heeding my churlishness; "they must have had it as bad up the country."

I turned and fronted him. The policeman was a youngish fellow and had only one stripe on his sleeve. He was known to me by sight. It was evident he had no thought of persecuting me, and I replied with some civil remark. He talked on for a little about the wild weather, and told of having been out that forenoon when the rain was at its worst.

"This is not a great job sometimes," he said, "though you seem to think we're too well off, Mr. Bryce;" and he gave a laugh. "What makes you so hard on the policemen?"

By now my suspicions were gone; I even understood why he had started the talk. So I spoke to him frankly, explaining that I looked on the police as merely the tools of the rich, and

that I should rather see them in some useful calling.

"That's right enough, Mr. Bryce," he admitted; "but what's a fellow to do? I joined the force without really knowing what I was in for. You see, I was fond of athletics, and I knew that in the force I would get time to follow it out, and would even be encouraged. Then I got married and was into a family in no time. What am I to do now? I have five-and-twenty shillings a week and uniform, and am sure of a pension. I wouldn't have that at any other job, for after you're in the force a while your muscles get soft for want of work, and you couldn't do a good day's work; in fact, nobody would have you."

I acknowledged the difficulty.

"You must just follow your conscience," I told him. the day comes when you feel strongly enough that you must give up this way of living, you'll give it up and risk the consequences."

We chatted about this and that, and I asked,

"Is that the reason I've been stopped from speaking-

because I run down the police?"

"Oh, well," he began with a laugh; then checking himself, "there have been complaints, right enough. Some of the shopkeepers complained, and other folk as well."

"But you know as well as I do that all sorts have been speaking at the Steeple and other places. Why not stop

them?

"Well, you see, the rule is that we only interfere if there are complaints. I suppose nobody has complained about the other speakers or about the Army."

Other remarks passed, and at last he said,

"If I were you, Mr. Bryce, I would try some other place. There's the bottom corner of Water Street now; that's a fine open space, and you would be obstructing nobody."

"It's rather out of the way," I objected after a little consideration, "and the people that do pass usually keep the other side. I'm afraid I couldn't gather a crowd."

"It would be worth trying. I doubt it's only in some place

like Water Street that you'll be allowed."

We parted good friends; indeed, he convoyed me to the

end of his beat. As I strolled up the hill alone, thinking of our talk and of many things besides, a plan suddenly formed in my mind, and I resolved to make trial of it the next Saturday

night.

I was now growing familiar with the Old Town, and was trying to classify its inhabitants. A stranger visiting it on a Saturday night would pronounce it a huge den of prostitu-My sojourn in the strawberry-field saved me from this mistake. Plenty of the traffic went on; that could not be denied; but most of the females in the Wynds earned a living by work, and that of the hardest. Their talk was shameless: it had shocked me at our first acquaintance, and led me to adopt false notions about their character; later intercourse taught me that they were not destitute of moral standards. The girls were scandalised if a companion became a mother without being a wife; the women talked if one of their number seemed too free in her behaviour to men. This of itself distinguished the girls from females of the unfortunate class: they all looked forward to being married, and a fair proportion had their hopes fulfilled. They mostly affected youths of the corner-boy sort; soldiers, many of whom were sprung from the Wynds, were also favourites.

The mention of corner-boys leads me to speak of the male population. To set them down as mostly loafers would again be a mistake. All the heavy work of Craigkenneth and the surrounding country was done by the Wynd dwellers. They were the navvies, the "unskilled" labourers—how false that name!—who drained fields, made water-works, blocked streets, carried the hod for masons and bricklayers. Their work was casual and they had frequent spells of unemployment. This might lead to some becoming drunkards and loafers; but the average labourer was content with his weekend debauch, and was ready to turn out on the Monday morning. The unemployed stood at the mouth of the Vennal the whole day through. I thought at first they were loafing. The truth was, this was an al fresco labour bureau; employers

who were short of hands sent for them here.

Youths who had been born and reared in the Wynds were inclined to shirk steady work. Golf had demoralised them. With the golf craze the Royal Park had become a centre for the game, and the lads from the Old Town could earn an easy and not unpleasant living by giving themselves out for caddies.

When past the age for this employment they were unfit for any other, and they became street-loafers, ready to beg or steal.

To the Wynds had drifted a few who had seen better days. Once an abject creature stopped me and begged threepence. Why threepence? I inquired. Because he was going down to the sawmill, and that was the price of a bag of sawdust; he sold it in pennyworths to the small shopkeepers for their floors. In this miserable being, bearing all the marks of a born thrall of poverty, I recognised one who had been reared in a well-to-do home and had succeeded to a flourishing business. That he was now so low and vile was not all his blame, unless one may be blamed for lacking strength to bear awful and unlooked-for trial. Tried in strange wise poor F—— had been, but the story is too dark for telling.

At the coups where the town rubbish was thrown, wrinkled skinny crones and tender children by the dozen would be searching out rags and bottles to sell for what the rag-store would give them. Passing along the fashionable terraces of a morning I have seen creatures that once were women fighting with the dogs for the scraps from the ash-buckets. Yet the heavens did not turn into darkness or blood; stranger still, the passers-by did not wonder or even look.

One could not live long in the Wynds without feeling that the condition of the inhabitants was largely determined by the character of their dwellings. I have already said something about these. The most ancient, like the one I lodged in, had been the town houses of the nobility in the days when the castle was a royal residence. Few of these survived. Edifices dating from the seventeenth century were more numerous; they had belonged to county gentry and wealthy burghers. But the local aristocracy had long ago deserted their old mansions, and had built themselves villas and terraces around the Royal Park. The artisan class, even, who had succeeded them in the Wynd region, had in turn migrated to modern tenements on lower land, and the Old Town was now inhabited by the population I have tried to classify. In up-to-date slang it would be known as a slumarea; but the term would need to be applied with caution. The houses might fitly have sheltered a well-doing community; though old, they were spacious and substantial, very different from the cramped shells, the "brick boxes with slated lids," knocked up by the speculative builder. In situation, too, they were favoured. They stood high on the rock of which the castle is the pinnacle—an airier and, one would say, a healthier site than that of the modern town below. What, then, cancelled these advantages and made the Wynd region compare so ill, in sick-rate and death-rate, with the newer districts? This mainly. The properties had come into the hands of men who considered them solely as a source of revenue, and had divided them up till now a dozen families would be lodged in a house originally meant for one. Single apartments, even, had been partitioned to house several tenants, as had happened with the one I shared. As limited as the living space was the sanitary accommodation; a single closet would be attached to a building which was tenanted by a dozen families. The one pressing reform, I could see, was to abolish the over-crowding. I could see the difficulty as well. The slums were owned by influential citizens, some even by magistrates.

# CHAPTER XLI

TARIED and sometimes curious were the little offices I had to perform for For instance: In this same week, as I was passing a newsagent's about noon, the young woman who kept the shop asked me in. Here was the business. The Old Town, as I have repeatedly mentioned, is perched on a lofty rock and close to the castle. Besides the streets leading down to the modern town there is a broad path along one bank known as the Back Walk. Further down, the path winds among thick-planted deciduous trees and makes a charming resort in the hot days of summer; but on its highest reach, where it leaves the neighbourhood of the castle, it runs for a short distance along the edge of a precipice twenty fathoms deep. Fatal accidents have happened here at night. Worse still, the spot has been long notorious for suicides. Since I made my home in the Wynds, two persons, one an unknown woman, had thrown themselves down the rocks. The woman had done so in open day, and many of the Wynd residents had seen the body lying. Some, the younger females in particular, were none the better for the spectacle. My friend the newsagent told me that one or two people of the district had thought something might be done to prevent such occurrences, and it had been suggested that my help might be useful. The natural course was to ask the town council to fence the dangerous part of the Back Walk with a high railing. If I drew up the petition, she and her friends would see that it was taken round the district for signature and duly laid before the council.

While I did other people's correspondence, I wrote no letters for myself and I received few. One of the few, forwarded from Sparkwell, was from my old friend Ralston, who was now farming in Essex. But one night a loud rap sounded on my door, and on my opening I was asked, "Are you James

Bryce? This is for you, then." I looked at the address, and at once knew the hand for Meiklejohn's. What could he have to write me about? The note did not explain; it was merely a line: could I meet him in the Royal Hotel at halfpast one the next day?

I had no work to keep me from the appointment, and at the set hour I found my old friend waiting for me in the hall. He had never been demonstrative, and there was no boisterous greeting now; but the grip of his hand, the light in his eyes

assured me that I was welcome.

"We'll have a bite of something directly," he said, "but there's time for a minute's crack first;" and he led me into the bar-parlour, where I had once heard Stevenson, the auctioneer, talk about squeezing the last drop out of a man.

Meiklejohn suggested a mouthful of spirits as the day was sharp, and he opened his eyes when I declined anything more fiery than ginger-beer. He did not insist, however, and ere we had sat many minutes he remarked that it was quite like

old times.

"No, James. I'm not feeling any younger," he declared, when I congratulated him on his looks, and he spoke ruefully of the frequent journeys he had now to make to the Midlands. They weren't for a man of his years; his wife was worse about them than he was himself. "Ay, James, you've a lot to them than he was himself. answer for," he concluded.

"You're not asking for Nina," he observed in a little.

"How is she?" I asked, rather awkwardly.

He laughed. "She told me about being to see you. She has been in London for a fortnight now. She told you, I think, that she meant to go. But about yourself, James," he went on, when we had discussed Nina's plans a little; "you're doing a day's work here and there, I understand?"

I told him briefly how I had been employed.
"Now, James," he said, "don't you think, since you are bent on giving this sort of work a trial, that you would be better in a small place of your own? It's not satisfactory at all to be dependent on other folks for a day's work."

I agreed, and admitted that I had felt this myself. But there was no time lost; besides, small places were not easily

found.

"How would this suit, James?" and he passed over a newspaper cutting that he had taken from his pocket-book.

"To Let. Grange Orchard, St. Kenneth's, extending to three and a half acres or thereby. Particulars from J. and W. McEwan, Writers, Craigkenneth."

"It's worth considering," I admitted after a short reflection.

"That's my opinion," said my friend decidedly. "And you'll let me arrange about money matters, James. It's only your due. I didn't know how much you saved me till you were away."

I told him what money I had of my own.

"Well, well; that'll start you, and when you need more you know where to find it. So here's what we'll do, James; we'll call at McEwan's and get the particulars of the place; then we'll go across and see it for ourselves. But we'll have something to eat first. I'm needing it, whether you are or not."

We went into the coffee-room, which was busy, as it always is on market-days, and Meiklejohn sat long over the lunch. He may have thought that a good meal was rarer with me than it used to be.

McEwan knew my friend well, and I had met him once or twice. The Orchard, he warned us, was not in first-rate order, having been unoccupied for a year; however, we should see it for ourselves. Meiklejohn and I walked down to the

Ferry and crossed.

The village, hamlet rather, is separated from Craigkenneth by the river, which is no more than a stonethrow broad. As everybody knows, the Fertha hereabout makes many a strange meander in its lazy passage through the carse, almost returning after a wide circuit to some point it had passed long before. and enclosing in every such link a tract of rich alluvial land. In one of these haughs, all but an island, nestles St. Kenneth's. a clump of half a hundred cottages, some antique, with thick walls, tiny windows, and thatched or red-tiled roofs, a few modern, the summer dwellings of the well-to-do. The great attraction of the place, which brings strangers from every land, is, of course, the ruined abbey. I have no admiration for ruins now, or even for the ancient buildings and institutions themselves as history pictures them in their prime; so I will not linger on the power and splendour of the Abbey of St. Kenneth's, its famous abbots, the parliaments that have sat within its walls. The vast edifice has vanished almost as though it had never been; its stones, hewn and carved by

mediæval masons, have gone to build villagers' cottages and farmers' dykes and steadings; yet on the old turf the foundations can be distinctly traced, and hint to the curious stranger how spacious was the ancient pile. The towerof later date than the abbey itself—remains, a massive, though not lofty structure of the Early English order; also a solitary arch, once entrance to the nave and now serving for gateway to a tiny burial-ground still used by the natives. Indeed, I myself, as will be told, was to see a grave delved here. Not in this little pinfold but on the open green is a tomb that draws tourists from the ends of the earth. It stands near what is believed to have been the site of the high altar, and was erected not many years ago by a royal descendant to mark the place where a king and queen of the fifteenth century are laid.

Like many of the spots that the ancient churchmen chose for their abode. St. Kenneth's became a home of fruit-culture, and to this day the whole haugh is little more than a group of orchards, ranging from two acres or even less up to eight. The Grange Orchard, which is midway in situation, is midway also for size, comprising, as the advertisement put it, three and a half acres or "thereby." Though advertised as an orchard, it might as fitly have been called a market-garden. The orchard proper took up nearly half the ground. The land here had always been in pasture, and the trees were old; one, indeed, a pear-tree, was the largest I have ever seen, and, if it cared for the honour, might, I daresay, claim to be pre-Reformation. The rest of the ground, with the exception of half an acre left for vegetables, was broken into plots of strawberries and bush-fruits, though fruit-trees, all of them young, however, had been planted throughout. The place was fairly rectangular, with high substantial walls on three sides, and a thick quickset hedge fencing the orchard proper from the river.

After a survey of the place, which Meiklejohn, accustomed to well-kept gardens, considered wild, we entered the cottage. It was an old building, with a small kitchen, a smaller sittingroom, and a most diminutive bedroom. Above, and entered by an outside stair, was a large loft, which was meant, no doubt, for a fruit-house. The outhouses were newer and in better condition—a one-horse stable, a two-stalled byre, a

cart-shed, and milk-house.

"Well," McEwan asked, when we returned, "what do you

think of the place?"

"Yon stone floor in the kitchen will never do," said Meiklejohn. "I wouldn't let any friend of mine go into such a place. It would be his death in a hard winter."

The lawyer, a very deliberate old gentleman, looked at

my friend for a little without speaking.

"I'll tell you what might be done, Mr. Meiklejohn," he said at last. "If other things were arranged, I could have a wooden floor put in. I've a good deal of liberty, for the owner is abroad and won't object to my putting out a little expense if I get a sound tenant. There are one or two other alterations that could be made at the same time. The windows are rather small."

"Yes; that was another thing I was going to mention."

"Well, it wouldn't be a serious business to have them enlarged. It would only mean picking out a few stones all round and getting bigger sashes. Of course, all that could only be done if you took a lease of the place."

"And that'll depend on the rent," said my friend.

"The rent is £30."

"£30! By jings! Mr. McEwan, you know how to let property. I wish I could screw our folks up to that figure. £30! Let's see. Say £12 for house and outhouses and £18 for the ground. That's £5 an acre. We get thirty shillings on an average for ours."

"Yes; but this is orchard ground, Mr. Meiklejohn; it's

all stocked."

"Yes; and what sort of state is it in? It would take a small fortune to clean it. We should get it the first year for nothing."

"That was the rent for the last tenant," said the lawyer.

"Ay; but did you get the rent?" retorted my friend, who had learned from the boatman that the last tenant had given trouble and had left ere his lease was out.

"Well, the less said about that the better, maybe," McEwan admitted with a smile. "I don't mind saying that we're prepared to come and go a good bit for the sake of getting a satisfactory tenant."

"If the rent had been something like a third less, say £20,

we might have considered it," the factor suggested.

McEwan shook his head.

"I could have had more than that a year ago. There were offers for the place as soon as it fell vacant, and some of the parties are after it still; some have been here this very week. No, no; you'll have to name something reasonable.' What do you say, James?" my friend asked.

you think we should have a talk over it first?"

"That might be better," I said, and after a little further talk we came away, though the lawyer, I could see, would fain have had a bargain clinched.

"What's your opinion of the rent, James?" Meiklejohn asked, as we strolled towards the Royal stables for his trap.

"Do you think the place is worth £30?"

"I don't. Your figure was quite enough."

"Yes. Still, if you fancy the place, James-and I rather think you do; in fact, if McEwan makes those alterations I believe myself it could be made a nice tidy wee spot-well, I was going to say, we shouldn't let the chance slip for the sake of a pound or two. I'll see that the rent doesn't break

We discussed the question further, and at last my friend

said.

"I'll tell you what, James; if nothing fresh transpires before next Thursday, we'll meet at the old shop at the same hour, half-past one, and go along to McEwan's and settle the business. He won't fix on anybody else without letting

us know; I'm certain of that."

The afternoon's work left me unsettled. I could not but see that the Orchard offered certain advantages. For one thing, I should always have work waiting. Already the casual labour was growing fitful, and as winter advanced I should most likely have a lot of slack time. While I could do with

a day now and then, I objected to weeks at a stretch.

Again, I should be my own master. I had entered the service of fruit-growers and farmers because only in this way could I have work at all. Still, I recognised that it was unsatisfactory and unnatural to be anybody's servant. Better, certainly, to be servant than master; better to be the wronged than the wrong-doer. But the best is to be neither, and here was a chance of independence.

The longer I thought of the Orchard the more attractive it looked, till I grew uneasy lest it should slip me. And it would, unless I gave a higher rent than Meiklejohn had suggested; indeed, it might, whether or no, for the other applicants, who would doubtless see the charms of the place as clearly as I did, might increase their offers. So afraid was I of being forestalled that I resolved to visit McEwan the next morning as soon as his office was open. Should I have patience

enough to wait even those few hours?

This resolve ought to have calmed my uneasiness, yet I had a feeling of discontent, dissatisfaction, which had rarely troubled me in my new life. Suddenly the thought came: What are you doing? Here are you as jealous, as grasping, as eager to forestall others as any worldling could be? Was it for this you changed your life? Was it not to be done with

this? Was it not to love? to help?

In a moment—how needful to take our bearings!—I saw whither I had been drifting. Let who will take the Orchard, I said to myself; I will offer no more rent, I will let Meikle-john offer no more in my name. To be done with it, I sat down and wrote McEwan that my tender of £20 was final; I wrote Meiklejohn also, telling him what I had done, and both letters were posted ere I went to bed. Though my chance of

the Orchard was gone, my peace was restored.

On the Saturday night I was ready to face the police. The space at the Steeple was unoccupied, but I made no attempt to speak. Two policemen, not the pair that had interfered with me before, were stationed near by, and they would no doubt attribute my silence to their neighbourhood. Some of my acquaintances accosted me and asked if I thought of speaking; more than one assured me that the police could not put me down if I persisted. I told them they would see ere long. At the head of Market Street, their usual stance, the members of the Salvation Army were gathered and I watched them, though from a distance. Soon after eight o'clock their band struck up and away they marched. The place was not well clear when I stepped forward and, waiting only till the music was far enough away to let me be heard, I shouted:

"The last night I spoke at the Steeple my subject was Drink. I asked why it is that people drink to excess, and when I was stopped by the police I was trying to give the reason:

people drink in order to forget."

Already the two policemen were round the Steeple, and

standing not thirty yards away. I continued:

"Now, I wish to consider the Drink question as it affects

us, the working-people, and I maintain that, whether we have ever said so to ourselves or not, we of the working-class drink to excess for the same reason. We have a great deal in our life that we are anxious to put out of sight, and drink is the handiest means of doing that. Most of us spend our days in work that has no interest for any reasonable being; or, if it happens to be interesting and useful, it is done under a master's eye and for his profit, and is paid at a rate far below its true worth. We know, sometimes clearly, sometimes dimly, that we are being humiliated and plundered, and to get this unpleasant knowledge out of our minds we drink."

Ere I was this length the two policemen, who had been taking counsel together, had resolved on their action: they marched forward, and as I closed the last sentence they were

at my side.

"You'll have to clear out of this," said the taller man in a surly, commanding tone.

"Why?" I asked calmly.

"We don't allow speaking on the street."

Turning my head away from him and facing my audience,

I went on:

"Now, there are two ways of getting rid of anything that troubles you. The one is to drink and so forget it. Drink clouds the reason, dulls the sense of pain, and puts away your trouble—for the time. There's another way, and by it you can put away the trouble not for the time only, but for all time. That is, to keep your sober senses, and with clear eyes and unclouded mind to face the trouble and put an

end to it."

My hearers, I am afraid, were not following me very closely, though they maintained great silence. They were looking from the police to myself and anticipating fun. The policemen were evidently at a stand; they had no instructions for dealing with a situation like this. For a few minutes they muttered together; then, with a very resolute and business-like air, they stalked off, making up Guild Street, I presume for the police station. As I went on with my speech, I was aware of many in the crowd glancing every now and then up the street for their return. I was ready. I would continue speaking, and if they stopped me it should be by force. If I were prosecuted, the authorities would have to show why a group of fanatics were free to bawl with "throats of cartilage and

metal" and I must not speak a calm word of truth on the same spot. Quite sure of myself, then, I continued speaking, and if, like my hearers, I gave an occasional glance up the street, it was with no apprehension. Now and again a brief interruption would be caused by a "drunk" or a critic; that was all. When my speech was ended, the pair of resolute officers had not yet returned, and as I moved away I could not check a moment's feeling of triumph.

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## CHAPTER XLII

N the Monday evening I had a letter from McEwan asking me to call the next day. When I went down, he told me he was inclined to accept my offer; it was important that they should have a sound tenant, and from his acquaintance with myself and my friend, Mr. Meiklejohn, he preferred me to the other applicants that he didn't know so much about. I was dubious, by this time, of the existence of those applicants. However, I agreed to take the Orchard, and the following day I attended at the office again and signed a lease for five years. The alterations on the cottage were to begin at once. Till it was habitable I could lodge, the lawyer suggested, with some family in St. Kenneth's.

Lodgings could easily have been found, for I had already friends in the hamlet. Of the young fellows who had attached themselves to me one, Robert Wordie, stayed in St. Kenneth's; his father, indeed, had one of the orchards. Wordie offered to find me quarters. But I declined. I was quite pleased to live on in the Wynds a little longer, and, if it was a slight trouble to cross morning and night, I was master of my time.

The most pressing task at the Orchard was to prune the fruit-trees and bushes. Kenneth went over the place with me every Sunday, and his long experience in fruit-growing made him a useful adviser. Wordie, who usually accompanied us, was also a help; he had been familiar with the Orchard all his life, could tell when the younger trees had been planted, which of the older ones were good bearers, and what vegetable crops best suited the soil. As he had already told me, he had worked on his father's place for two years after leaving school, but found there was only drudgery for him, no wage, no pocket-money even; so in disgust he chose a trade as unlike as possible, and he had for years been with a draper

in Craigkenneth. His experiences in a town-shop were not

more satisfactory, and had driven him to Socialism.

I had to look to the rasps first, cut out the old wood, tip and tie up the new canes. Kenneth advised me not to spade up the ground, but merely open it with a fork, clearing off the weeds at the same time.

Next, the fruit-trees. The old ones I did not touch; the

young I merely cut back a little.

The gooseberry-bushes I thinned, as some of them were overgrown with wood, but I gave them no more pruning. Here, too, I used the fork, not the spade, for turning over and

cleaning the ground.

The strawberries, Wordie told us, had been pulled for four seasons. Kenneth thought they should be left another year: I might get something off them. As they were very foul, I had better delve the alleys. For a well-kept break of strawberries he did not recommend delving, though he had seen it practised all his life and had been compelled to practise it himself. It was too sore on the roots, he held; the proper tool for cleaning the alleys was the hoe.

In general, Kenneth's advice was to move cautiously the first year. Once a crop was off, I should know what to take

out and what to spare.

It was a mixed winter, neither frost nor fresh weather lasting for long spells. By the time the trees and bushes were gone over and the ground round them turned up, the cottage was ready for occupation. I moved in on the second last day of the year after a ten-weeks' stay in the Wynds. Never had I had a happier home or friendlier neighbours. Not once had I encountered a rude act, an uncivil word. My only complaint, indeed, was that the natives had treated me with too much respect. Sometimes I thought that in my old age I could do no better than make my solitary home in the ancient quarters of a town—not Craigkenneth, where I should be a speckled bird, but some place like it-there, unknown, unnoticed, to pass my last tranquil years, and there to die. Nowhere, among town-dwellers at least, should I be more at home; nowhere should I be more certain of neighbourly offices, should these be needed. But it is early yet to be making plans against old age-early for me, at any rate, who cannot look beyond a day.

For some weeks after taking up house I was kept busy

delving. It is work I relish, and every fine day I was at it as long as light permitted. Indeed, I often felt, with a certain amusement, that if a master had asked me to work so long and so strenuously, I should have denounced him as a slavedriver. Yet I never gave a grumble, if it were not at the shortness of the day. Provisions were brought to the door in grocer's and baker's vans, and I was seldom out of the Orchard bounds except for one half-hour each day, which I spent on the river-side, watching the water-hen play hide-and-seek among the sedges, the dab-chick float up with the tide, or a solitary swan, that had haunted that reach all winter, sail to and fro as proudly as if the river were its own. It was not hope of gain that tied me to the place; I knew too well that under present conditions one will gain little, though he may lose a good deal, by country labour, unless indeed he has a band of underpaid hirelings to labour for him. I worked because the place was in a way my own and I loved it. Yes, I loved it till I was nearly forgetting the interests that it and my labour in it should have been only the means of advancing. Though I still spoke at the Steeple on the Saturday nights and was interested for the time, I was no longer devoured by the reformer's zeal throughout the week. Once I had the spade in my hands I looked neither behind nor before nor beyond; the task of the moment had all my heart, and once or twice the half-comic, half-rueful thought came to me that I should be unwilling to die since death would part me from the loved spot.

But ere the Orchard had grown so dear as to make me utterly forget the world outside, a thing was to happen that would revive the soul within me and guide my life to issues I may not

yet know.

I have mentioned that near the abbey tower, in what has been part of the nave, is a tiny railed-in graveyard. Returning that way from my riverside ramble one morning in early February, I found an old villager delving a grave. I had not heard of any death in the hamlet, and I stopped to ask old Whyte whose resting-place he was preparing. This was his story.

Near the point where the lane from our hamlet joins the highway between Aletown and Craigkenneth is a little round plantation of deciduous trees. It is enclosed with a low wooden fence which stands upon a grass bank, for the wood

is somewhat above the level of the surrounding fields. At dawn the previous day a shepherd lad whose flocks were boarded on those fields came on the dead body of a man hanging head downward from a stake in the fence. The man was elderly and a tramp. He had doubtless taken shelter for the night in the lee of the wood, and had chosen the fence to rest on because there had been rain and the grass was wet. When resting here he had gone to sleep and had fallen backwards; the pointed stake had caught his clothes at the fork and he hung impaled, skewered like an ox at a butcher's door. He had struggled; so it could be seen from his rigid limbs; but there was nothing to give purchase to hand or foot and let him wrench himself free. A doctor and a policeman were called, but the man had been hours dead. The body, in the clothes it was found in, was coffined in a cottage near by and was to be buried this day at noon.

A handful of the villagers, myself among them, attended the funeral. Not a score of paces from the spot where a king and queen rest beneath their altar-tomb they laid the nameless vagrant. No stone marks the place, and yet he was not to

be without a memorial.

For the next two days the tragedy was never out of my thoughts. I found myself plunged into the distracted agony that had surged over me a year before and nearly swept away my reason. On the evening of the third day, at the lanemouth on the Aletown and Craigkenneth road, a Notice appeared:

ANY HOMELESS PERSON
MAY HAVE SHELTER FOR
THE NIGHT AT GRANGE
ORCHARD.

Some hay and straw had been spread in the byre and stable,

and a plateful or two of bread left there.

The night was cold, with a keen frosty wind, and I knew there would be visitors. So I resolved to sit up beyond my

usual hour. In the course of the night I went round several times to the outhouses. No one was there. I waited till past midnight. No wanderer came. It was a surprise and

a disappointment.

But there would be guests next night, for sure. Again I sat till late, again I made repeated visits to byre and stable, again I was left alone. So things passed the next night and the next; soon I forgot about the Notice, and the Orchard again had all my thought. But there was a difference now: I had no longer the feeling that other duties, more vital, were being neglected. If the Notice had brought no outcasts to

my abode, it had brought peace to my own soul.

February continued dry, and in the second-last week of the month I had such a tempting seed-bed that I resolved to venture on the first sowings. On the Monday, if it were fine, I should put in some leek-seed. The Saturday before I went over to Craigkenneth to fetch the seed, which had already been ordered. Passing Cullen's bookshop, that always displayed some portraits of celebrities in the window, I got a start. Who was that? Could it be——? Yes; there was the name, and even without it I could not be mistaken. In some agitation I entered the shop and asked for the photo to be handed down.

"Why are you selling this?" I inquired of the shop-girl.

"What's remarkable about it?"

She could not say. Mr. Cullen was out, but would be back after dinner. If I called again he would be able to inform me.

I could not wait, but I came over to Craigkenneth again on the Thursday and visited the mart. Meiklejohn was standing with a group of farmers near the door of one of the rings when I caught sight of him. He came forward with a glad face, and was beginning to explain that if I could wait half an hour we might have a while together, when I stopped him and said that I was busy, like himself.

"But here's what I came to ask you about;" and I pulled out Nina's portrait. "What's the meaning of this? It was

for sale in Cullen's window."

He gave a laugh. "Man, did you not know? Are you not seeing the papers?"

I never saw a paper, I told him.

My friend then informed me that Nina had had a notable

success: she had won the Handel Prize. What was the Handel Prize? It was a prize founded some years before in honour of the great composer, and the competition was open to all singers who had studied for a certain time at any German conservatory. Nina had gained the women's prize. What made her success the more remarkable was that only once before had the prize left its own country, and then it was for America. Of course, as Meiklejohn explained, the success meant more than appeared; it ensured that Nina

would soon have her choice of engagements.

I could not rest indoors that night; I wandered out alone under the still, starry sky, thinking of my sweetheart. The very stars brought her nearer to me, for when we walked together at nights she used to ask me about them. There were the Seven Sisters. I recalled the night and the spot where she pointed them out to me and I told her the name. How I admired her courage, her self-confidence, which the event had justified! I who was not a success, whose poor attainments were the outcome of painful effort, admired one whom Nature had endowed for the work she chose and whose first call commanded success. Might love for her art, might all kind influences, charm her from the dangers that would beset her now! In these musings I had strolled clear of the hamlet when a man who had come up at a great pace, pushing what seemed to be a perambulator, stopped and asked,

"Excuse me, mister; but am I right for the Grange

Orchard?"

My thoughts had been so far away that the interruption gave me a start. And the question of itself would have been a surprise.

"Grange Orchard!" I repeated. "Yes. Are you want-

ing to see—to see the tenant?"

The man gave a sort of laugh.

"Well, I can hardly tell you," he said. After a moment's pause he added, "But, to be frank with you, it's like this. There's a Notice back there directing any homeless person to the Grange Orchard. Now, I'm homeless in the meantime, and I'm making tracks for it."

Only when he mentioned the Notice did I begin to divine his errand. I assured him he was right, and as I turned to accompany him I mentioned that I was responsible for the

invitation.

It was three days, he told me, since he left Aletown, where his wife was staying, and he had expected to be home that night. However, trade had been bad and he had waited longer than he had meant to, for he did not care to go home empty-handed. He had observed the Notice when passing two days before, and when he found himself at the corner that night he determined to ask shelter rather than take a six-mile tramp in the dark.

It struck me as singular that he should have a wife and yet be tramping the country with a young child. No doubt there would be reasons, and it was none of my business. He seemed more curious about me, however; at least, he was franker in his curiosity. Was this just a notion of my own—this sheltering of homeless persons? Had I been at the thing long? He had never come across such an offer in his travels.

Did many tramps come about me?

I told him what had led me to think of the plan, and what accommodation I had provided for any one who might come.

"But," I said, as we reached the cottage, "you'll be better in the house when you've a youngster with you. There's plenty of room. You'll take the kitchen—it'll be cosier for the child—and I'll occupy the room for the night."

He gave a merry laugh; indeed, his manner was as lively

as his step.

"No, no, sir," he protested; "the outhouse will do first-rate, and I'll be proud to handsel it."

"But the youngster!" I reminded him. "We must make

it as comfortable as we can."

He laughed again, and assured me that his kids had been

brought up to be hardier than himself.

"Come in, anyway, and we'll have a mouthful of something to warm us," I said; and I opened both halves of the door to admit the pram. "Bring it into the kitchen," I said, when he seemed disposed to leave it in the cold passage.

When the lamp was turned up my first glance was for the child. To my horror it was hidden beneath a canvas apron till nothing of its face was visible. The man must have covered it up to protect it from the night air, perhaps also from the recent shower; but his masculine stupidity was like to be fatal.

"Hang it! you'll smother the youngster," I cried.

"Two of them," said the fellow as cheerily as ever; "twins—boy and girl, Jocky and Jenny."

"Good gracious! that's worse. The carriage is small

enough for two at the best."

"Never fear. Take a look at them. They'll be sucking their bottles," he said, with the liveliness that nothing could check.

Stooping down I tenderly drew back the covering. What a cheat! I brought to view some of those curiosities used in certain rural parts for weather-glasses and familiarly known as "Jocky and Jenny"—toy houses of chip and cardboard, gaudily painted and ornamented, with two open doors at which a lady or gentleman appears, according as the weather is to be fine or rainy. Though I had never seen them in this district they had been common in England, and I knew them at once. When the fellow gave a loud "Ha, ha!" at my expense, I joined heartily in his merriment.

"Sold again!" he cried. "But never mind. You're not the first, not by a long way. Most folks don't know what the show is for, even. I don't suppose you know yourself."

I let him see I did, and I explained that the toys were to be found in many farms and cottages in Hamptonshire; about Wiston, for instance, where I had often been.

"Very likely my own," he said. "I'm in those parts every year. I know the Midlands better than any other bit of the country. Used to be a groom, and lived a lot in the hunting counties."

At supper that night and while we breakfasted next morning he gave me some of his life-story. He was a native of County Tyrone, his name Shiels. Though my ear is quick for dialects, I could not well have told his nationality; the brogue had been completely rubbed off by travel.

"Tell you a good story of those stable-days," he said, when speaking of his stay in a noted hunting centre. "You don't

have any High Church hereabout?"

"Not that I'm aware of," I answered, amused and a little surprised to find him versed in ecclesiastical distinctions.

"You'll be an Orangeman, perhaps?" I suggested.

"No, no. It's the bells, sir; the bells. There was a High church near the part where most of us stable-boys had our quarters. Well, on Sunday mornings the bell began at eight and kept it up every hour or so till night. The mischief was

that Sunday was the only morning we got enough of our beds, and not a wink of sleep could we have for this cursed jingle-jangle. Well, some of them complained, but the parson took no notice. Then I put them up to the dodge. One of them goes to the parson's house, rings the bell, not sparing it either: 'I say, miss, you might tell the parson not to ring before eleven on Sundays.' As soon as he comes back to the stables, off goes another and does the same. That man's door was kept opening and shutting every five minutes the whole blessed day. The maids didn't object, for some of the boys were strapping fellows, but the parson couldn't stand it; soon had more of the bell than he wanted. Caved in the

next day, sir; caved in the next day."

Shiels' wife—a native of Leicestershire—and his three children were at Aletown. He did not favour lodging-houses; his custom was to rent and furnish a room in the place that was his headquarters for the time, dispose of the things when he moved, and furnish anew at the next halt. The wife made paper flowers and hearth ornaments; the two older children, both girls, were at school; the youngest, a boy, was only three. Shiels was proud of his family. "I'll back 'em against any of their own weight in the county." For the sake of the girls' schooling he sometimes stuck to one centre till forced to move by risk of starvation. Altogether, the home, as he pictured it, appeared before me as a cheerful spot in the Arab wilderness, and one was the more surprised to see the father careful in guarding its peace as he was himself well practised in all the rogueries, and doubtless in many of the vices, of the vagrant.

When Shiels and I parted on the road the next morning, we were like friends of years, and as I glanced back at the spare figure tearing on behind the pram, the tails of the old clerical frock flying in the breeze, my heart had a feeling of hopefulness for the world that was worth the trifling kindness

I had rendered ten times told.

With Shiels began a stream of guests that has continued till now. Not many nights have passed, certainly not one week, without a visitor. I never asked a question of them:

> He 'helpeth' best who leaves unguessed The secret of another's breast;

and most of them departed without telling their history or

even their name. Some, indeed, I have never seen; in the dark they came and ere light they were away. But a few, of their own will and, I daresay, for their own relief, have told

me their story.

The most remarkable among them for appearance, indeed, the most kingly-looking man, perhaps, I have ever seen, was an Englishman, native of an eastern shire. Far over the six feet, with a frame broad enough to match his height, and with everything else,-large shapely hands, full fine features-in perfect proportion, he looked,—in spite of the cast-off tattered clothes, most of them too small for him-he looked a king, a king in disguise. In his soft musical voice and in cultured tone and speech he told me how he had been meant for the Church, but, as his parents were not too well-off, had been sent, not to Oxford or Cambridge, but to Trinity College, Dublin. His father's death cut short his college career, and he took a situation as clerk in some business house. He filled different situations of the kind. At one time he was secretary to a cork-cutting syndicate, and when so employed gained a practical knowledge of cork-cutting, and afterwards worked at the trade in different towns. There is a cork factory in Craigkenneth, and the hope of getting into it for a time had brought him to my neighbourhood. When I said that all about the man was in keeping with his majestic figure, I should have excepted his voice, which was singularly low and gentle. It indicated, I have sometimes thought since, the defect that accounted for his failure—a softness of character, namely, which would quite unfit him for the struggle of business life. When I say "failure," I use the word, of course, in the world's sense.

Navvies came, passing from some district where a big enterprise—waterworks, railway, or the like—had been completed to another where a like undertaking was begun; pedlars with a string of boot-laces or a card of buttons as a cover for begging; tramps and professional beggars with nothing. The last had often women with them, haggard, hopeless-eyed creatures with all the softness and bloom of womanhood long, long lost. One afternoon in April brought me a strangelyyoked pair, both young men. One was a well-set-up fellow of maybe eight-and-twenty, an Aberdonian, as I knew by his tongue; his mate, a lad of little over twenty, of foreign blood apparently and with an angel's face. He had long black

curls, an oval face, olive skin with, however, a delicate bloom on the cheeks, perfect features, and the innocent expression of a child. Of Italian parentage, he was a native of London, and had been trained as a cook in Gatti's. The pair had foregathered in an Edinburgh lodging-house and had been pals for two months. They stayed with me some days, helping me with a new strawberry plantation. The Aberdonian was a capital worker, the Italian lad the most handless and helpless that ever I saw lift a tool. They stayed, as I said, three days. The Italian, I think, was disposed to stay longer; it was his friend who seemed restless. Though by no means so attractive in looks as the angelic lad, his companion, he is often with me in memory, and that because of the story he told me the day he left. Perhaps he told it to excuse his leaving. He had been a dock-labourer and was in the militia. At the outbreak of the war he was called up and served through it all, being away four years. His wife went to stay with her father in Dundee. All the years he was away he had no word from her, though he wrote her several times. The war over, he came back to this country, and made at once for the home where he had left his wife. Her father came to the door, took him in kindly enough, but answered his questions about his wife so haltingly that the young fellow saw something was wrong. At last he said, "Tell me at once; what's become of Mary? Is she away with another man? Tell me the truth. I can stand it."

"Mary's dead," was the answer. "She died ten months

ago."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

"We wrote you twice about the death. And Mary wrote you time and time before, and we never got the scrape of a pen from you."

"I never got a letter! And I wrote Mary I don't know

how often."

"The letters never came here, then."

I asked the young fellow how that had happened, and he said one of his sergeants, the sergeant-major, if I remember rightly, had kept up the letters, both those that came and those that should have been sent away.

What could be his meaning for that?

"I know," the young man said; but he told me no more and I did not ask.

"That knocked me to splinters," he went on, talking as impersonally as if he were giving the fate of some stranger. "I was as steady a chap as you are, and since that I've gone straight to hell."

I found that he lived on the road by singing—" raising a shout," he called it. The young Italian gathered the coppers.

I risked a hint that he was young yet, that the best of life might be in front, that all depended on himself. His only reply was,

"To hell!"

Yet as I recall his protective, almost tender, attitude to his beautiful helpless companion, the way he praised him to me— "he's a thoroughly trained cook; I suppose at his own trade he can't be beat"—I try to think that the light was not wholly quenched.

If his story was true—and why should he lie to me? he was one of several I have encountered who were undone

through women. Here is another case.

Going out early one breezy spring morning I was astonished to see a figure flying round the orchard plot near the river. Strolling down, I found a little spare man, with only his trousers on and naked from the waist up, tearing round the grass plot as if for a wager, holding straight in front of him a stick with what looked a flag streaming from the end. When his fleet career brought him near me, I accosted him with, "You're surely training."

"Dryin' my sark, man!" he yelped, without checking his course; and I had to conclude that he must have been washing his shirt and was taking this simple method of drying it. At breakfast he told me nothing about himself, though he discoursed in a consequential tone on other topics, mainly on

the state of trade throughout the country.

"And trade seems as bad aboot Craigkenneth as ony gate.

So Charlie Landale was telling me yesterday."

For once I was curious about my guest, feeling sure that the little man's history was worth knowing; so I asked Wordie, who was with Landale, to find out what he could. Here is

Landale's account, as Wordie reported it.

"I've known Jake Rentoul all my days. He belongs to Kirkcaldy, like myself. We're just of an age and were at school together, and then served our time in the same shop. When we were through, I went to Glasgow but he was kept

on with Page. Jake was always steady and well-behaved, and as smart a little chap as you could meet, very particular about his appearance, and very clean and tidy; in fact, a dandy in a small way. It was a curious thing that put him wrong. He married soon after he was journeyman, married a lassie of the place and a schoolmate of his and mine, Lizzie Beveridge. She was a decent enough lass, but had a quick temper and a sharp tongue, and the pair of them quarrelled a good deal, for Jake was inclined to be cat-witted too. Well, one day at breakfast-time the two of them had a bad row, and Jake went off to his work in a great temper. When he came back for his dinner, he gets his wife hanging behind the roomdoor, dead. Jake has never done a day's good since. He began wandering about the country, and he took to drink badly. He worked at his old trade here and there-he's worked for me here; but if he put in a week at one place, that was as much as he could manage. He has told me himself that he can't help it; from the day he found his wife hanged something came over him, and he has never been able to settle."

Wordie mentioned the shirt-drying.

"Yes; that's well known. In fact, he's still very cleanly in his ways. He won't put up at a lodging-house—he rather lies in barns or behind hay-stacks; and he's very particular about washing himself and his clothes. It's a wonder he had even the breeks on when your friend saw him. I've heard of him flying along a country-road stark naked, with his shirt on the end of his stick. That's how he comes by his nick-name,

'the Flying Tailor.'"

Another guest claims a word, not in the same connection, however, for his self-esteem would have borne him wound-proof through the fiercest marital strife. He was a bard—to give the full name and designation, Robert Ritchie, the Bathgate Poet, or, as he pronounced it, "Paw-et." Robert was a short, broad man wearing on to sixty, with a complexion rendered florid by his open-air life and not less, perhaps, by his free indulgence in his country's wine. The night he visited me he was well perfumed with the essence. A friend—I shall speak of that friend later—was sharing my home at the time, and a merry night we had listening to the bard's stories and confessions. He did not hide his failings.

"Yes," he said, not in rude Doric but in the speech that

became a man of letters, "I have a weakness; I own it. I'm too fond of turning up my little finger. But what can you expect? I go into company; indeed, my company is in great demand. Then the cry is, 'Ritchie, give us a song;' 'Ritchie, read us one of your paw-ems;' 'Ritchie, let's hear that stump speech on the Land Question.' Then the jovial bowl goes round and I imbibe too freely. It's the failing of

genius, and Ritchie's not the man to say he's perfect."

He showed us the poetical leaflets by the sale of which he made a livelihood: The Auld Hame, A Visit to the Field of Bannockburn, or, "what is generally pronounced my master-piece," The Poet's Dream. He wandered the whole year and the whole country through: "They know Robert Ritchie from Inverness to London," he said with pride. England was his favourite hunting-ground. His system was to ferret out his successful countrymen and claim a share of their good fortune. The Burns' Clubs especially, which have been established in most of the large English towns, furnished him with patrons. Nor had he any false modesty to deter him from seeking recognition from the great.

"There's Lord - I've tried to interview him and get something in the way of a small pension or allowance. I called at — when I knew his lordship was at home. But I couldn't see him. He sent out a sovereign by a flunkey. However," he continued magnanimously, "I don't blame his lordship; it's not his fault. I know him to be a patriot and a warm patron of genius. But he has been so often taken in

that he has grown suspicious."

It was a sweet forenoon in mid-April, and I was busy with a plantation of young strawberries, what time the blackbirds were whistling their mellowest, when a gentleman known to me by sight—he was a Craigkenneth business-man, I understood—came into the orchard and began chatting to me about my work. In a little he turned the talk to the tramp question, asked if many homeless persons availed themselves of my invitation; where I lodged them, and so on. Pleased with his interest, I offered to show him the place, and we went up to the offices. He surveyed everything keenly though unobtrusively, and after hearing how my guests were accommodated, he asked.

"You won't have any other outhouse, Mr. Bryce, that you could give up for this purpose, some place where—where a person could be alone?"

"Nothing but that little place that used to be the milkhouse," I said in some surprise. "I daresay it could easily be turned into something of the kind, though I never thought of that."

"I would pay, of course," he said, "pay whatever you considered reasonable."

"Is it for some one you know?" I asked.
"It's for myself," he answered, glancing at me for an

instant and then looking away.

I could not speak for a time, so great was my astonishment. He was well dressed, his manner was that of the well-to-do business man, and if he was a loose liver his face did not show it.

"Oh yes," I managed to say at last, and stuck there.

There was another painful silence ere he asked.

"I suppose you know me?"

"I know your face quite well. That's all."

"My name's Ballingall. I travelled for the Muirheads,

the motor people."

"Oh yes," I said again. "I was sure it was in Craigkenneth I had seen you." As he made no remark I added, "So you think of trying the simple life?"
"I'm forced to. You'll know about my—my misfortune?"

"No," I answered.

He ventured to look me in the face.

"I thought you would. I was dismissed for-for a mistake with money." Then, as if making a great effort, he added,

"I got nine months for it and am just out of jail."

"I never heard a word of it," I was able to assure him. "I rarely see a paper, even a local one," I explained, "and I'm not in the way of hearing gossip. So you'll be out of

work at present?"

"Yes; and out of a home as well. You see, it's this way, Mr. Bryce. I was-I came out a week ago, a week last Monday, and I made my way back to Craigkenneth. I wasn't penniless; I have a married sister in Kilmarnock in good circumstances, and she sent me enough to go on with. Well, I took lodgings in Edward Street till I could look about me. When I had been there two days the landlady informed me she couldn't keep me after the week. She didn't give the reason and I didn't ask; I knew it well enough. Somebody had told her who I was. So I left on the Saturday night." I could hardly credit the story, and I said so. He smiled.

"That what's before me now, I suppose."

He went on to say that he had not looked for another room, knowing that he would be driven out of it in time. The last two nights he had put up at a Temperance Hotel. To continue that was, of course, beyond his means; besides, hotel-keepers would soon be told about him and would put him out.

I took him into the cottage and showed him the little bedroom, explaining that I slept in the kitchen, and that the room would be better occupied than empty. It was very painful

to see his emotion at the offer.

Getting Ballingall to stay with me has been one of the greatest blessings of my life. By nature I am somewhat of a solitary, and my peculiar circumstances have encouraged the failing. Ballingall's company took me out of myself and taught me the joy of comradeship. He, too, seemed happy in his new home. When he cared, and that was often, he worked in the Orchard; but the task, I could see, that gave him greatest pleasure, and that he took out of my hands entirely, was to arrange and provide for our casual guests. I sometimes thought he should have tried to start afresh in a new country, but I never made the suggestion for, after all, a man should know himself best. Perhaps he felt rather old-he was fiftyfive—for the enterprise. We were together two months, all too short a time for me; then his brother-in-law found him an opening as clerk in a Kilmarnock foundry. I have no doubt he would be ready, should there be need, to give me share of his purse and home, and it may be that the need will come ere long.

## CHAPTER XLIII

Y attention to homeless wayfarers occasioned remark. I might have thought of this, but had not. Dwellers in Craigkenneth and even in parts beyond visited the Orchard as the fine Spring days were lengthening, and had all sorts of ingenious excuses for obtaining a sight of my improvised lodging-house. Most contented themselves with making some polite observation that might mean anything, but one or two were more outspoken. A young fellow, a law-clerk in the town and an acquaintance of Wordie's, visited me one Sunday along with my friend, and after he had explored the byre in every recess he surprised me with the abrupt question,

"Are you not frightened they'll cut your throat?"

When I had gathered my wits sufficiently to take in his question, I asked in turn,

"What would make them do that?"

"Just devilry. The most of them will be fit for anything."

"But surely," I represented, "they have sense enough to know that that wouldn't benefit them. Very likely the reverse. The next tenant might not keep open house."

"That's all right; but I'm pretty sure you keep a good

strong lock on your door."

Wordie laughed. "Man, he doesn't lock his door at all;" and when the law-clerk looked incredulous, Wordie continued in a bantering fashion, "He thinks it's queer to be calling folks our brothers and yet be locking the door in their face."

"I hope he doesn't find his mistake, that's all," observed

the young fellow with an air of wisdom.

Wordie afterwards informed me that the law-clerk set me

down as "a bit off."

I could laugh at this, but another story that came to my ears gave me annoyance. It was that the byre was occasion-

ally the scene of orgies in which tramps of both sexes had part. Lies, of course, the invention of evil minds; so quiet was the place usually that one could not have told that people were there. True, that with the advance of Spring mill-girls, tramping between the big cities of the north and south, accompanied sometimes by young fellows of the corner-boy sort, found their way now and then to the Orchard. But the poor wretches—those, at least, that I saw—footsore and famishing, sought only rest and food, and had neither heart

nor strength to act the part of the Jolly Beggars.

As Summer drew near we had other visitors. with tangled hair and Bohemian head-gear came and sat in my orchard and tried to make the rose-white apple-bloom beautiful for ever on canvas. Tourists from far lands passed on their way to the abbey tower and the royal grave. Pleasant, too, it was on sunny days to stand and watch the ships go by among green meadows and orchard-trees. Baltic sailingvessels they mostly were, with cargoes of timber or linseedcake. Grassy banks concealed both the hulls of the ships and the narrow winding channel, and you had the illusion that they were fairy craft gliding on green fields instead of watery ways. With Summer, too, came new duties. My early vegetables were ready for sale. Market-gardeners know that to raise the produce is only part, and not the hardest part, of their work; they have to get it sold. Luckily I had a friend whose warnings kept me from costly mistakes.

On one of his first visits Kenneth had remarked,

"It's impossible, Jamie, that the orchards here can pay, the way they're conducted."

"How is that, Kenneth?" I asked.

"Weel, Jamie, there's hauf a dizzen orchards in the place, nane o' them big, and yet every ane has a powny and trap except Young's and yer ain. Noo, one powny and trap wad dae the hale wark. Think what a savin' that wad be!"

"That's so," said Wordie, who was in our company. "I've told our folks that many a time. Now, to give you an instance of the waste that goes on. I went to Aletown one day with my father to hawk apples and pears. We hadn't half a load in our float. When we were starting we met Hope coming home from Craigkenneth with a small load of coal. When we were hawking the Aletown shops we came across Buchanan on the same job as ourselves; he hadn't half a load either.

Now, one horse and trap could have easily done all that those three did that day; in fact, as you say, Kenneth, it could easily do the work of all the orchards in the place. Three horses and three traps could be dispensed with; the money it took to buy them would have been in our pockets, and the horses wouldn't have been to feed. There's a saving for you."

"True," I admitted; "it's enough of itself to make all the

difference between a profit and a loss."

"There's this as weel," Kenneth observed. "Instead o' four folk bein' on the road, ye wad just need ane, and the ither three could be workin' at hame."

"Yes; that's as important a thing," I said.

"And there's more than that," Wordie pointed out. "When the four are on the road, they bring down the prices on one another. I saw that when I was at Aletown that day. The shopkeepers would say to my father, 'Your prices are rather high. Buchanan may be round to-day; we'll wait and see what he's charging.' They would say the same to Buchanan, no doubt. But if the growers sent out their fruit together with one man, they would have the shopkeepers at their mercy instead of being at the mercy of the shopkeepers. At present, they're simply cutting their own throats."

"It's a wonder," I said, "that they don't see that."
"They can't help seeing it," Wordie replied. "I've pointed it out to every one of them, and I've told my father till I'm tired."

"What's their objection?" I asked.

"They've plenty of excuses. They'll tell you, 'It wouldn't work; for one might be needing the horse for hawking at the very time that another wanted it to bring goods from the station.' But there's nothing in that. The real reason is, they can't trust one another; every one is frightened his neighbour will steal a march on him."

Thinking over the question when alone, I saw many other ways of saving if the lot of us could work together. Instead of buying a ton apiece we might order our coal by the truck and get it considerably cheaper. So with our seeds and manures. My neighbours admitted the suggestion was good, though as yet they have not acted on it. I have avoided their ruinous folly in the marketing of my produce. My fruit and vegetables I have always handed over to one or other of my neighbours to dispose of along with his own, and have paid him a little for his trouble. So far I seem to have had as good prices as though I had been my own salesman, and the saving

in other ways must be equal to a rent.

Wordie declared it was jealousy that kept my neighbours from acting together. He may have been partly right, though there was, I believe, another reason, Country folks, those at least who have small concerns to manage, lack enterprise and are slow to change. This appeared in another matter. In and about Craigkenneth, as in all populous districts, there was a brisk demand for Spring plants—cabbage, sprouts, and the like—and most of these came from other parts of the country. I suggested that we should turn some likely plots into small nurseries. My neighbours were ready with objections: the soil was too deep and loose, the situation too low and exposed, the plants would be killed off by frost. Some of their objections seemed reasonable, and I resolved to have advice ere venturing on the experiment. One day early in July I called on my seedsman in Craigkenneth, told him of my scheme and the difficulties my neighbours had offered. He laughed, and asked if they had ever tried to raise plants.

No, I told him.

"Then how do they know whether the place is suitable or not? I may tell you this: there's a district "—and he named it—" very like St. Kenneth's as regards situation and character of soil, and whole fields of plants are raised there. The growers even bring some capital cauliflower through the winter with very little shelter, unless the weather is exceptionally severe."

I ordered a fair quantity of seed, and the seedsman insisted that I should try the cauliflower as well.

"I'll put up a quarter a pound," he said. "If it goes, I'll make no charge, so it'll only be the loss of your labour."

This business settled, I was free to attend to another matter that had brought me over that day. The water-supply in the Orchard had been irregular since the dry weather came in, and though I had complained to McEwan and had received assurances that things would be put right, nothing had been done. When I went into the office, I told my business to the manager with whom I usually had to do.

"You had better see Mr. McEwan himself," he said, and though I wished to leave the message with him he insisted

I should wait. In a few minutes he took me across the lobby to McEwan's own room.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Bryce," said the lawyer cordially; and ere I could mention my errand he apologised for the delay in repairing the pump, and promised to have the work carried through at once.

I thanked him and rose.

"Sit down, sit down," he said.

I complied, though I could not help glancing at the motto on the wall, "'Speak short, sharp.'—Shakespeare," and wondering why it had lost its force. He was in no hurry to enlighten me; indeed, the silence was prolonged till it grew awkward. At last he said,

"There was another point I meant to speak to you about,

Mr. Bryce."

The lawyer was an oldish man, middle-sized and rather stout, with grey hair and beard. His eyes were small; indeed, he made them so by keeping them always half-shut. He spoke through his nose and in a high-pitched tone.

"I'm not altogether satisfied with the way you're con-

ducting things over there."

"Indeed?" I said, thoroughly surprised.

"Yes. I must say I'm not satisfied, Mr. Bryce," he repeated, and shook his head without saying more.

"I thought the place was in fair order," I said.

"I don't mean that. The orchard may be worked well enough and yet other things may be far from satisfactory."

He stopped again, and this time, as I had a suspicion of what he was coming to, I did not help him out. McEwan had a way of cocking his head to the side when about to say anything he thought important. It was in this attitude he was surveying me now.

"I'm told you have a Notice up inviting tramps to pass the night on the premises." He stopped for a little before asking,

" Is that so?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Just so. Well, Mr. Bryce, you must be aware that no proprietor will put up with that."

"Has the proprietor made any complaint?"

"No; he has not. Because the proprietor is in British Columbia and doesn't know anything about it yet. And I shouldn't like him to know; that's more. But I have the

care of the place in his absence, and I don't consider I should be justified in allowing that to go on. It would ruin the

property—ruin it entirely."

"Well, Mr. McEwan," I represented, "all I can say is that anyone who saw the orchard when I took it and who looked at it now would think it considerably improved, instead of ruined."

"That's not the point, Mr. Bryce, not the point at all;" and the lawyer gave his head many a shake. "You're making the place a lodging-house for tramps, and nobody will occupy a property, far less buy it, after it has been used in that way."

I said nothing, indeed I had nothing to say, and after a

pause the lawyer continued:

"Then there's the risk of fire. That's a very serious consideration."

I told him the precautions I had taken.

"That's not the main point, Mr. Bryce," he said. "You may not be aware that an insurance company won't pay a claim if it's known that the occupier of the property has allowed tramps to stay on the premises at night. So if the Grange was burnt down, you would get nothing for the loss of your effects."

"I'm afraid my effects aren't insured, at any rate," I

laughed.

"Perhaps not. But the serious thing is, Mr. Bryce, that the owner would get nothing if he was known to have allowed this to go on."

I bethought me of having seen an insurance calendar

hanging in the outer office.

"What company is it insured with?" I asked.

He told me.

"You're the agent for that, aren't you?" I said, with a laugh. "So that it would depend on yourself whether the

claim was paid or not."

"Eh—not entirely, Mr. Bryce. The company might send down an inspector from headquarters, and he would soon ascertain how the place had been used. However, that's away from the point. I can't have this risk incurred either by the proprietor or the insurance company, for both of whom I am acting."

Again I made no rejoinder, and he went on,

"There's another thing, too. I'm agent for other proprietors

and tenants at St. Kenneth's, and it's not fair to them to let this continue. It depreciates their property."

"Well, Mr. McEwan," I said, "I think you might wait till

they complain themselves."

"That's precisely what I've done, Mr. Bryce." Seeing my astonishment, he added, "Your neighbours have complained, and very bitterly, and that's one reason why I'm bringing up the question to-day."

"My neighbours have complained!"

"Yes; and have asked me to take action."

"That's very singular," I said. "They have never complained to me. They have occasionally referred to the matter.

but never in the way of complaint."

"I don't know that it is so very singular," said the lawyer, with an amused sniff. "The person most concerned is often the last to hear the stories about himself. But I can assure you I have had complaints, and not from one of your neighbours only."

I could only repeat that it was very singular, and perhaps my neighbours' double-dealing may have inspired the lawyer with some sympathy for me; at any rate, it was in a tone of

friendly expostulation that he said,

"So you see, Mr. Bryce, that for everybody's sake your plan will be to let the thing drop. Take the Notice down quietly, and if any wandering body should still come to the place, keep the gates and doors locked, and they'll soon stop coming." He rose as if the interview was over and the matter settled. "I'll take it, Mr. Bryce, that you'll do that, and there'll be nothing more about it."

"Probably you don't know, Mr. McEwan," I said, keeping

my seat, "what made me start this."
"I don't."

I told him of the old man who had been found impaled on

the fence.

"Well, that was very deplorable," said the lawyer, who had resumed his chair, "and I think I did notice the accident in the papers at the time. But you couldn't help that, Mr. Bryce."

"I might have helped it in this way: if the old man had known of any place in the neighbourhood where he could have had shelter for the night, he wouldn't have been out there and

wouldn't have been killed."

"He could have got into alodging-house for a copper or two."

"He hadn't a ha'penny about him," I said.

"Well, he could have had shelter at the police station. They'd have been bound to take him in."

"That may be. But, you see, rather than do that he would

spend the night outside."

"That was his own fault. At all events," snivelled the lawyer, and he moved as if about to leave his chair again, "you're not obliged to provide for such people. Do as I suggest, Mr. Bryce; take down the Notice and stop encouraging those folks about you, and there'll be an end of all this trouble;" and he did rise now, with a decision that told he meant to end the dialogue, at any rate.

I rose too, though I had still something to say. In truth, I was not greatly concerned about the issue of our discussion, and I was minded to indulge the luxury of plain speaking.

"Suppose, Mr. McEwan," I began "you had a child, a daughter, we'll say, who had left her home and hadn't been heard of for years. She comes back one night, comes back in rags, starving, almost dying. Would you shut your door, lock your door, against her?"

"That's a different thing, Mr. Bryce," said the lawyer, frowning, "a different thing altogether. It's our duty to

look after our own."

"Would you mind the neighbours' talk if they complained about you taking the wanderer in? Would you consider whether her presence would lower the value of your property?"

He raised a protesting hand, but I went on,

"Would you bid her go to the workhouse or ask shelter at the police station? Would you even do what I do—leave her the stable or the byre to sleep in? No. You would give her the best room in the house, you would let your business stand, you would think of nobody else, you would give all your time and attention to tending her."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Bryce; that's all true enough. But there's no similarity between the two cases. Your family's your family. But you can't treat everybody in that way. It's impossible, it would never do. To treat strangers, utter strangers, as if they were your own flesh and blood!

Preposterous!"

"That's what I don't see. I have a feeling—which I don't act up to, I'm ashamed to say—but I have the feeling that all

men and women should be to us like our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters. Once that feeling has got into a man's heart, he can't drive it out, he must even, to a certain extent, live up to it. I only do so in a very poor way, still, it's better than nothing. You can stop me, Mr. McEwan; you can turn me out of the place. But so long as I'm in it, so long as I have a roof over my head, I must shelter my brothers and sisters who haven't one. It's not a thing to argue about; I simply can't help it."

I had begun my sermon in a detached, impersonal tone. As I proceeded, the thoughts I uttered took a grip of myself, and it cost me some work to keep my voice steady. The lawyer himself was not comfortable; his brows were drawn, and he avoided looking at me even with his half-shut eyes.

"That's all right, Mr. Bryce," he said, when I was done; "it's quite a good notion to have and I see that you mean well, I admit that at once. Still, as things are at present, those notions can't be carried out. I'm thoroughly in favour, of course, of helping the poor and doing what one can—reasonably can, for those in distress. But one must allow for circumstances; we must consider the state of society "—and he edged towards the door—"and—and, in short, Mr. Bryce," he concluded, catching the handle, "you'll find it the best course for all concerned to stop harbouring people about the place and to take down that Notice." With this he opened the door and bade me Good-day.

The talk kept running in my head as I wandered along the street, and I was scarcely sensible of what was around me. The sight of Baxter's window brought me to a stand. I must countermand my order; the likelihood was I should never need the plants. For some minutes I stood doubtful. Then came the thought: Well, if I don't need them, somebody else will; so we may let the seeds come and put them in when they do come. As always happens with me when a self-forgetful resolve is reached, I felt light of heart, and I was about to turn away when some one caught me by the arm. It was Meiklejohn, in company with Jeffray, a Lowis farmer. Jeffray nodded, but walked on when he saw that the factor meant to stand.

"Going in to Baxter's, James? No? Well, come along to the hotel. I was just going along for the trap, but we'll see if they haven't a snack of something left. I've hardly—"

I burst out laughing. "You think I'm starving myself, Mr. Meiklejohn. Do I look as if I didn't take my food?"

The humorous smile that wrinkled my old friend's face

was a confession.

"Oh, well! But we can go across to Ure's there and have

a cup of tea. You're not too high for that."

As we sat in the tea-room, talking of old times and old friends, he mentioned that Nina's parents were looking forward to her home-coming next month. She had not been home since she left for London.

Meiklejohn then asked in a kindly way how the Orchard was looking, and when I only smiled for answer, "Nothing

wrong, is there, James?" he inquired.

Glad of the chance to unbosom myself to a friend, I related

all that had passed in the writer's office.

"So you're to be knocked about again," said my friend when I was finished. "But, James, listen to me. You've been at this kind of thing for a twelvemonth now. It was just this time last year that you left us."

"So it was," I said. "I had forgotten that. It'll be a

year almost to a day."

"Well, James, here's what I was going to say. Don't you think you've given it a long enough trial? Isn't it time now to settle down?"

"I can't get settling down," I remarked with a laugh.

"That's not what I mean, James. Don't you think it's time to go back to your old work? You've had your fling; young folks will, some one way, some another. Look at Nina. But now that you've had it and satisfied yourself, it's time to fall into line again. You surely feel that yourself, James."

I shook my head. "It's quite impossible."

"It's not impossible, James," said my old friend, who mistook my meaning. "No doubt you've hurt yourself. Eh, man! you had a great chance. But we could mend the hole yet. I couldn't take you back, for the admiral's set against you; he never mentions your name, and that's a bad sign. But the marchioness is your friend still. I saw her in London last week, and she was asking about you; she never misses. And even independently of her or any of them, I could get you a good start again, for my word will go a good length on many an estate."

I shook my head again and was about to speak, but the

factor went on,

"Now listen to me, James. You've had your fling, as I said. But you must admit yourself, you've got no encouragement. If you had been likely to set the Thames on fire, if you seemed likely to be made a Labour M.P.——"

"Stop, stop!" I said, putting up my hand.

"Plenty are, that haven't a head like you. But, as I was saying, there's no sign of that; you've made no following, no position; so that there's evidently no future for you on that line. Well, the sensible thing will be to come back to your old way of doing."

"Don't speak of it, Mr. Meiklejohn," I said. "It's all true what you say. But it wasn't to gather a following or gain

a position that I made the change—"

"No; but even the folks you wanted to help don't thank you. Your very neighbours want you turned out of your bit

place, according to McEwan."

"True. But that has nothing to do with it. When I made the change, it was to relieve my own conscience, to get peace of mind. And nothing could induce me to go back to my old life."

"You're obstinate, James, as obstinate as ever," said my friend; but he evidently recognised that further reasoning was vain. "Did McEwan limit you to any time for taking your Notice down?" he asked after some more talk.

"No. And even if he does decide to turn me out, he'll

surely not do it till Martinmas."

"In any case, James, you'll advise me if you have to shift? I particularly want to know."

I gave him my promise.

As I sauntered down to the ferry, in the radiant afternoon, reflecting on the past interview, I was called out of my reverie by encountering a party of Americans, from a Western State of New England, as I found, who stopped me to ask if they were right for the abbey. They accompanied me down, talking occasionally to me, mostly among themselves. I thought of the contrast between us—they flitting over the face of the earth, I tethered by the string of love to my little Orchard home. Yet watching their thin, nervous, unsatisfied faces and looking into my own heart, I felt—but save me from spiritual pride!—that the better part was mine. Then I

thought of my friend's words. It was now a year, almost to a day, since I had entered on the new life. What had I found? I had been a failure as a reformer. That was what Meiklejohn had meant, had almost said. I had not made myself a person of consequence, I was not likely to become a Labour M.P. Great Powers! A Labour M.P.! No. But I could not on that account confess myself a failure. It had never been my aim to reach such eminence, or any eminence at all.

I had gathered no following, had won no disciples, no converts. Perhaps not. But was I therefore a failure? That could not fairly be said; for, again, I had never had such aim. I had begun speaking, just as I had begun living, because I could not help it. The truth had to find utterance through me; that was all I had to care for. Whether it touched others

was no concern of mine.

I was to be turned out of my home, it seemed, and as Meikle-john had reminded me, at the instigation of my neighbours, the people I would fain have helped. Well, even if I were to be a homeless wanderer, I should not admit that I had failed. Outward conditions were not a test for a case like mine. I had done what some have wished to do and have died without doing—I had followed the inward guide, I had lived my dream. And it was my own heart, and that alone, that could pass judgment. Has a man gained everything but happiness? Then he has gained nothing. Has he found happiness, satisfaction, peace? Then, whatever he may seem to have missed,

he has found all. Tried by this, I was not a failure.

We had to wait a minute at the ferry. The air was so soft and warm, the sky so pure, that even my Western friends yielded to the sweet influences, one remarking, "Well, this is a day, sure-lie!" We entered the little boat and I took the oars, while the boatman answered the many questions of the tourists. A little way down stream a young man in a homebuilt punt was gazing into the radiant depths of the river; he was pearl-fishing, and the boatman had to explain the process. I was free to follow my own thoughts. When I had pulled a stroke or two and had the boat clear of the jetty, old Mitchell's question, clean forgotten for years, came to mind—the talk with Meiklejohn would have brought it back, I daresay, though the associations of the ferry and the summer season may have had to do with it as well—Would you live your life over again? In a flash and of itself the answer

came: Yes! Gladly! Without one misgiving! The answer was a surprise and a wondrous joy. And as I walked up from the river through the little hamlet that in so short a time had grown so familiar and so dear, the chatter of the voluble tourists was powerless to check the current of my thoughts. I set myself to read the mystery. Why, at a time when my prospects were so fair, when, as the old ferryman put it, I seemed likely to reach the highest pinnacle, had I recoiled in something like terror from the thought? And now, without a future, and soon to be without a home, I welcomed it! Soon I had the secret. Our present state of mind it is that determines our estimate of the past, maybe of the present as well. The terror that the question had first raised was an involuntary confession of the awful discord that then was between my outward life and my true nature. I was now at peace with myself, and it was worth while having

gone through the past to stand where I now stood.

My serenity of soul did not pass with the hour. It was with me in the ensuing days that were lived under the shadow of the lawyer's threat. The prospect of being a homeless vagrant had no terrors; perhaps then, was my thought, I should be happier than ever, for there would be nothing false in my position—I should be as low as the lowest. With new sympathy I could look on the wanderers who came to my cottage for shelter. One who stayed with me for a night told a story that touched me by its very simplicity. He had found himself at Aletown and had wished to cross the river: a barque with a cargo of pit-props had been berthed at a small port lower down and he hoped to get a job at unloading. But he could not raise the threepence to pay the ferry; so he set off for Craigkenneth, where he would cross by the bridge. That was a seven-miles' tramp. He would have to walk as far down the south shore ere he found himself at the spot from which only a furlong's distance had parted him at the first. Fourteen miles to tramp for want of three coppers! He told the story without complaint, and listening to him I seemed to make his feelings my own and to look on the world with his eyes. He rested in the cottage for the night, and in the morning I took him down to the ferry. The postman had just come over from Craigkenneth with the letters. one for me. It could only be from the lawyer's office; yes, there was the envelope in the clerk's schoolboy hand. After seeing my guest into the boat I tore it open. But I had made a mistake. The missive was not from the lawyer; that it was addressed in a clerk's hand had wrought the confusion. This was a letter I had no reason to look for.

"DEAR SIR,

"We enclose herewith draft for £35 14s., being royalties on your song 'Three Moments,' and we append a statement of sales up to 30th June."

The writers were well-known music-publishers in London. I stared at the document without taking in the sense. Only after a while did my wits return and suggest the truth. Nina must have published the song. How she had contrived it without needing my consent I could not guess, though I was aware that if a woman is bent on a thing she will not be stopped

by scruples.

The same forenoon I went over to Craigkenneth to cash the cheque; the money, indeed, was welcome, for my purse was near the bottom. From the bank I proceeded to Cowan's music-shop and asked if they could procure me a song "Three Moments," and I gave the publisher's name. They had it in stock, the youth at the counter mentioned to my surprise, and he promptly handed me a copy. I had only time to glance it over, but on reaching home I perused it at leisure. "Dedicated to Miss Nina Fleming. Three Moments. Words by J. B. Music by Emil Lobstein. Sung by the celebrated Welsh Tenor, Hugh Wynne."

So my poor verses, long forgotten by myself, have reached the public ear and have pleased. The credit, I own, must be with those three whose names are set down on the printed page. Still, it will be another of the odd chances of my lot, if my living, or part at least, is to come from a song.





